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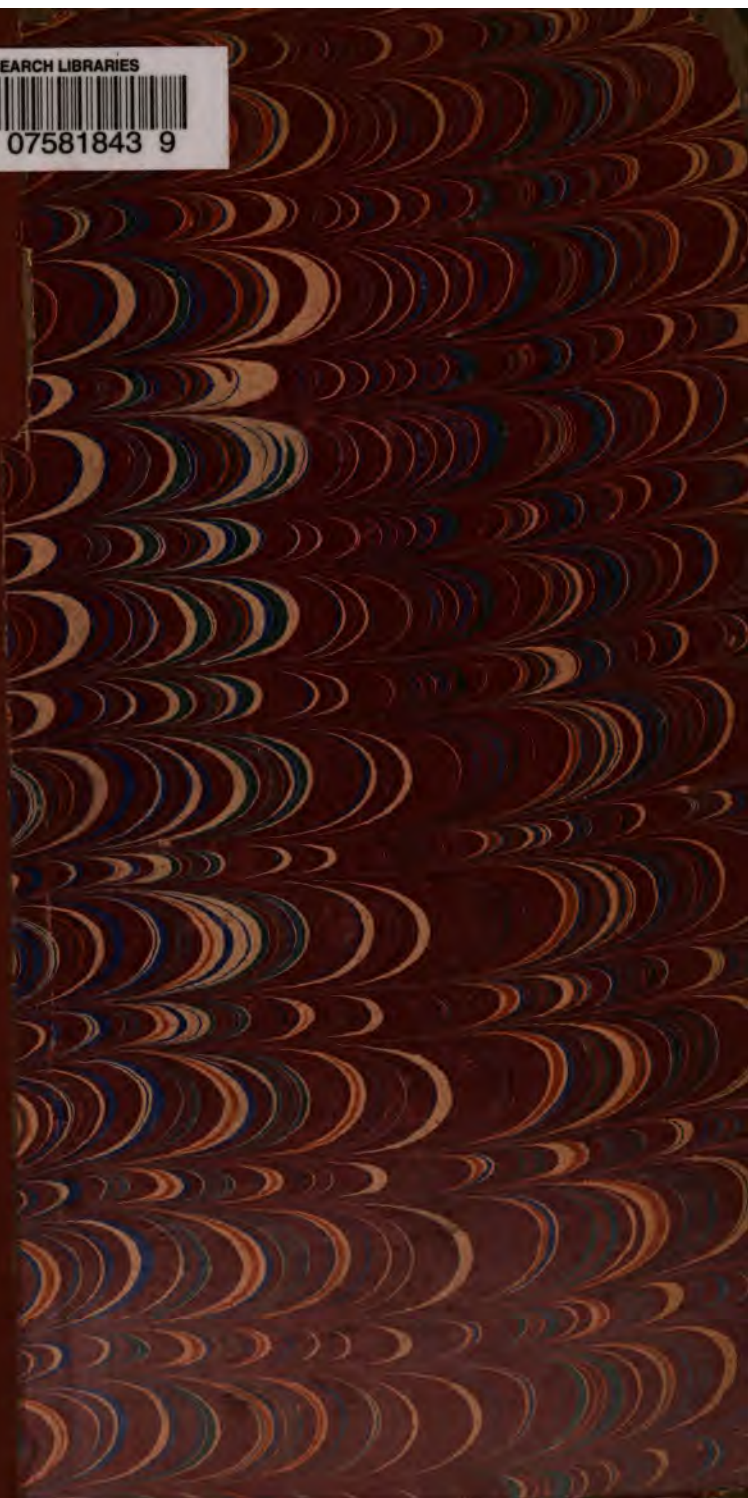
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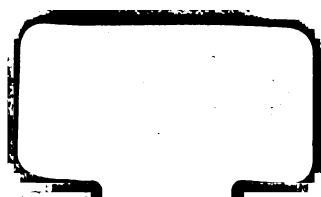
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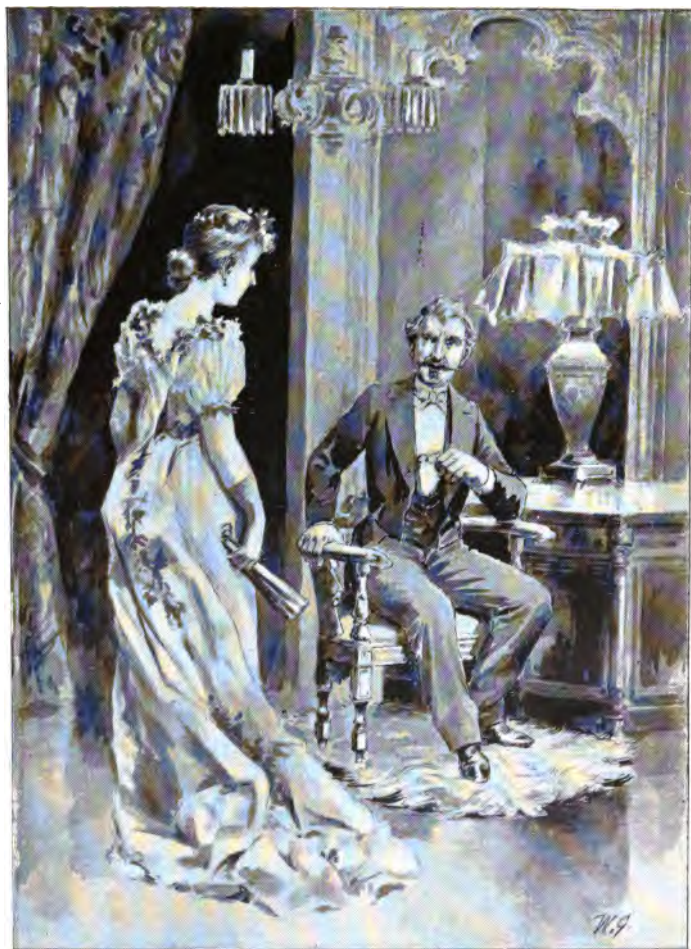
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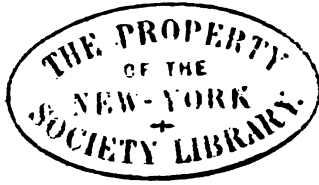
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"FATHER, DO YOU THINK I LOOK WELL?"

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THE HEIRESS

BY

"HENRI GRÉVILLE"

[Alice M.C. Durand.]

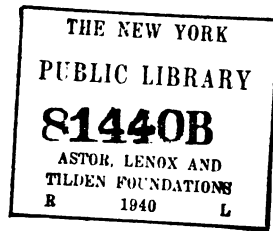
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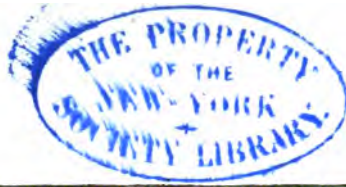
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THE HEIRESS.

CHAPTER I.

"FATHER!" At the word, spoken by a soft young voice, beautifully modulated, Monsieur Lemartroy raised his head, and a smile illuminated his weary face.

In the mellow light of the tall lamp upon his desk, softened by large shades, shone a beautiful vision; a filmy Oriental gauze, gathered into a thousand tiny folds, and shot with silver thread, enveloped the elegant and noble figure of his daughter Marcelline, familiarly known by her friends as Lina. The pretty head, with its pure, almost classic features, was poised upon a slender neck above delicate shoulders, as yet

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almost too thin, but of a whiteness greater even than that of the dress of soft and rustling silk. White jasmines, set off by their leaves as by a dark lace-work, formed a coronet above the almost black, naturally wavy, shining tresses. The eyes, also black, smiled out from beneath a pair of fine brows. The mouth, rather large, but of beautiful shape, displayed exquisite teeth, formed for biting into all the fruits of life.

"Father, do you think I look well?" asked Marcelline, drawing a little nearer.

Monsieur Lemartroy raised one of the green shades, and the light fell upon the young girl. "One might at least be satisfied," replied he, tenderly. Lina slowly revolved, in order that her toilet might be viewed from all points. The garlands of jasmine were carried in all directions over the glittering gauze, encircling the young shoulders, the slender waist, the bottom of the skirt all shimmering with silver.

"Then you approve my taste?" she asked again.

"Insatiable! will you never be tired of compliments?" asked her father, taking his gloves



from his desk among the evening papers which he had just been glancing over.

"Of yours, never," declared Lina, as the maid wrapped her in an opera-cloak trimmed with white feathers.

Monsieur Lemartroy arose. "Let us go," he said, moving toward the stairs. His tall figure had bent a little lately ; one would have said that the head was too heavy for his shoulders. He quickly followed his daughter, who seemed to glide before him upon the noiseless carpet. After her he entered the close carriage, warmed and cushioned, which waited before their door, and they drove toward the Place de la Concorde, by the Boulevard Malesherbe.

"You will not be cold ?" asked Lina, as she lowered the glass on the side.

"It is you who should be asked that ; I am not *décolleté* myself."

She made a gesture of happy indifference. "Oh, I ! I always need air," replied she ; "and then, it is so lovely."

The breezes of March, fresh and pure, made the gaslights quiver around the Ministère de

Marine, brilliantly illuminated for a ball. The carriages came slowly along, single file, and dropped the guests two by two, four by four.

Monsieur and Mademoiselle Lemartroy were met at the very entrance with compliments upon the appearance and toilet of Marcelline. Some of the more rigid mammas thought it a little eccentric—they had never seen anything like it in any of their fashion magazines—but the general impression was one of sympathetic admiration.

The dancing had already begun ; Monsieur Lemartroy had some difficulty in making his way into the ball-room. Near a door stood Madame Barly in the centre of a group of friends, all willing to chaperon Marcelline. In the impossibility of preserving his balance in the midst of all these black coats and uniforms, and in the equal impossibility of finding a seat, only waiting to see his daughter seated, he beat a retreat toward a less crowded room, where had been formed little coteries of older women and men who had renounced the follies of the dance.

At the door he met Admiral Barly, who

grasped him warmly by the hand. "Are you here, Lemartroy?" said he, in his usual hearty manner. "You have seen my wife? That's right; let us sit down in some quiet corner; there is one left, though there will not be in fifteen minutes." Although Monsieur Lemartroy had doffed only too early the uniform of a commandant, he had retained in the navy many warm strong friendships. Those, even, who had most regretted having seen him quit the service, had never on that account forgotten nor neglected him. They had understood that he had renounced his career when the premature death of his wife had left him with a nine-year-old daughter, who had no one to look to but himself. Having become a widower, Monsieur Lemartroy had not wished to run the risk of a chance bringing-up for his only child, obtained at the hands of a paid assistant. By a curious, rather uncommon train of circumstances, neither he nor his wife had any near relations; the little daughter was indeed an orphan. Her father turned all his strength, his mind, and his goodness toward

repairing the loss ; he lived only for her, and to a degree succeeded in his efforts.

"You are very fortunate," said Admiral Barly to him, after having complimented him upon Lina's beauty, certainly very striking this evening. "Your daughter is charming——"

"You have nothing to complain of on that score, Admiral," replied Monsieur Lemartroy, politely.

"Oh, as to me, I have six daughters ; it would be a pity if one could not find two or three passable ones, without coming anywhere near yours. But you have only one. Fortunate man ! And, what is more, you have an enormous fortune——"

"Oh ! not enormous !" protested Marcelline's father ; "an easy competence, at most."

"Easy ! I agree with you ! Look here, my old friend, you wish to marry your daughter off, I think ?"

"Assuredly," replied Monsieur Lemartroy, with a sigh.

"How much are you going to settle upon her, between you and me ?"

"A million. The other million she will have after I am gone. I will have to keep something to make presents to my grandchildren."

"Two million! And you call that a competence? You are doing pretty well. How did you manage to grow so rich as that?"

Monsieur Lemartroy slowly shook his head. "This fortune is the outgrowth of our misfortunes," said he.

The admiral regarded him with such a look of astonishment that he could not help laughing.

"I have said misfortune," said he, "and I shall not retract it. It has been successive inheritances, which have gathered in our house, little by little, all this money, of which my daughter will some day find herself sole heiress."

"So much the better for her. She will not need it, such a charming girl as she is!"

Just then Lina appeared at the door, upon the arm of a young aspirant, and threw a look and a smile at her father, and then disappeared to the strains of a waltz.

"You will doubtless marry her into the navy?" questioned the admiral. "I am sorry I have no son. Six daughters! I don't really deserve that, you know."

"No," said Monsieur Lemartroy, slowly, "I do not wish her to marry a naval officer——"

"Why not? It seems to me you could not want anything better!" replied the admiral, growing a little heated.

"You are more than right, so it is not on that account."

"Why, then?"

Monsieur Lemartroy passed his hand over his eyes, and then looked his old friend squarely in the face: "I lost my wife," said he, "under circumstances which have filled me with sorrow for the remainder of my life. If I had been near her, the disease which carried her off would have been arrested in time. The wives of naval men should be surrounded by their families and friends—mine had lost all of hers during my absences. There was no one to be concerned about her, to look after her health, to take her attention. I myself saw it only too

late. Since then I have thought of it a good deal. I would not expose my daughter to the same kind of an existence."

"What the devil! *You* will be there, and later along she will have children—your grandchildren——"

"I shall not be with her very long," murmured Monsieur Lemartroy.

The admiral looked at him with incredulity, then his expression changed, and he made an abrupt movement. "You've made chills run down my back!" he exclaimed, with forced gayety. "You are lugubrious, my friend. What a droll conversation for a ball!"

As Monsieur Lemartroy did not answer, he asked, rising:

"How old is she, this charming Marcel-line?"

"Eighteen, a few days ago."

"You will have plenty of time yet. Don't be in a hurry; make a good choice."

"It is she who will choose," replied the father, with a melancholy inflection in his restrained voice.

"That is the wisest plan. Come, let us look at the dancing. Don't you want to?"

Lina danced with all her heart. Alone, in the midst of a bevy of women preoccupied with a thousand questions foreign in themselves to the pleasure in hand as such, she visibly enjoyed being young, admired, rich, well dressed, pretty, and also waltzing with a good waltzer. She stopped soon, a little out of breath, her cheeks rosy with exercise and enjoyment. Her cavalier, offering his arm, led her to Madame Barly, who kindly chaperoned her with her own daughter. She did not see her father, and began to chat merrily with her friends while she examined her dancing card. Suddenly she raised her head, and her glance swept the close groups of men standing in the doorways. She saw Monsieur Lemartroy with the admiral, and sent them a gay little nod.

"What a darling she is!" said the old navy officer, as they returned to their quiet corner. "It would not be one of my daughters who would think of me when she was in the swing of amusement."

"My friend, for the past nine years I alone have been father and mother to her——"

"*Parbleu !* Do you think I want to blame you for it ? But that makes no difference ; you have made it hard to marry her."

"And why ?" asked the father, anxiously.

"You have made her life such a very happy one that she can hardly help regretting any change, no matter what it may be."

"Could I do otherwise ?" asked Monsieur Lemartroy, with a sort of feverish energy. "When she lost her mother, she was so stricken I feared I would lose her also ; afterward the memory of her childish sorrow, so sincere, so prolonged, frightened me. I had not the courage to cause her tears. She was so sweet——"

"A little wilful," added the admiral.

"Yes, wilful, but not naughty ; she has always yielded to reason, or succumbed to necessity—not immediately—sometimes it required time—but at heart she is reasonable, very reasonable, I assure you."

The admiral smiled with the smile of a man

who is blessed with many daughters—and knows the inconvenience of such possession.

“You have allowed her to do as she pleased,” said he, with indulgent kindness.

“She has never desired to do anything reprehensible,” replied Monsieur Lemartroy, a trifle quickly.

“Granted ! but she has been entirely too happy with you ; a husband will probably be hardly so indulgent—and if he be—well (understand that he would be very wrong if he were not), she will demand in him most extraordinary qualities.”

“Why ? ”

“Why ? Well, my dear friend, I am not the man to pay you compliments, nor are you the man to listen to them, but after having had a father like yourself— How wretchedly things turn out ! I have six daughters, and never a son—the son that should have married your daughter ! But you will not have a naval man, so even if I had had a son——”

He stopped ; the disappointment of his life, in which his excellent wife shared, had been

that there was no boy to follow in his footsteps in the navy, which fact did not prevent his being the best of fathers toward what he called his boarding school.

While the two friends exchanged more general ideas in a lighter vein, the admiral watched Lemartroy stealthily, and found him in bad condition.

He strongly desired to chase away these gloomy reflections. He thought, in spite of himself, of an incredible story that he had once heard. A Russian, left early a widower, at the time of his wife having given birth to a daughter, had never permitted, in the blindness of his paternal affection, that his daughter should know any sorrow ; from the cradle up, images of sadness had been systematically kept out of her sight and hearing. The word death had for her no other meaning than disappearance. She had never, incredible as it may appear, seen a funeral, never worn mourning, never known other tears than those caused by physical pain. To lead a life so entirely artificial, a colossal fortune would have been necessary under the

despotism of the days of serfdom, and a residence in the country in a district far removed, where the master could order everything, and look after everything himself.

The princess of this fairy tale had paid very dearly for her marvellous mode of life, and her short-sighted father had lost sight of the fact that he himself was mortal. Suddenly stricken down, he had departed this life, leaving his work unfinished. His daughter, then about twelve years old, had learned in the same moment that one could die and that she was an orphan. The poor young fawn, overwhelmed by these frightful revelations, had not been able to withstand the shock. After a few months of vain repining, the little girl had also passed away, hating this cruel life, which had made her pay so dearly for her past ignorance.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," said the admiral to himself. "It is Lemartroy's melancholy that gives it to me. Are you going to the springs this year?" he asked aloud.

"I don't know yet, my physician has not spoken to me about it. I don't feel much worse

than common, you know, Barly ; I am never very bright. It will not do to judge of me by my appearance at all, for I am not old—barely fifty-six.”

“ You ought to live to be a hundred,” replied the admiral, without believing a single word of it ; “ but now, if you are agreed, we will go find a card-table, if it is possible to obtain one, and make up a game of whist.”

They played nearly two hours ; then Lemartroy looked at his watch.

“ Lina will be asking what has become of me,” said he ; “ I will leave you, my friend, to go and talk a moment with Madame Barly.”

Lina, seated, by her old friend, seemed waiting for her father.

“ Take me to the buffet, papa,” said she, taking his arm ; “ I am dying of thirst.”

“ Oh ! ” said her late partner, who lingered near her, “ you have twice refused me the honor of taking you there.”

“ Certainly,” said she, in a tone of half-mockery, “ did you not know that my father alone has that privilege ? ” While Monsieur Lemartroy proceeded to find refreshments for his daughter,

she seated herself a little apart, but soon found herself surrounded as in the ball-room. One begged of her a quadrille, another a waltz. She refused, gently but firmly.

"I am going," she said, rising.

An exclamation of dismay came from the group : "And the cotillon ?"

"Not the cotillon—never the cotillon while—in short, not the cotillon." Monsieur Lemartroy stood near her. "Take me away, papa," said the girl ; "I am tired."

"Sure ?" he asked, scrutinizing the cool face, where no sign of fatigue was visible. She made a little affirmative nod, and took his arm. By a half-turn of her pretty head she took leave of all her court, and went out, escorted by only two or three of the most infatuated. Upon the staircase they met the admiral, accompanied by a young officer.

"Already ?" said he, seeing Lina cloaked.

"She is taking me away," replied Monsieur Lemartroy with a pleasant smile.

Admiral Barly regarded his old companion in arms, with particular attention. "Well, I be-

lieve she is right," said he ; " you look very tired, comrade. I should be very glad to be able to do the same. But as for me, I am here until five o'clock in the morning ! Are you coming, Tracy ? Good-night, my dear child."

The young officer, who had not taken his eyes from Lina, started as if he had forgotten his duty, and followed the admiral without a word.

When they entered their house in the Rue de Prosný, the young girl embraced her father at the top of the stairs, upon the threshold of their connecting chambers.

" Well, papa," she said, gayly, " all good actions find their just reward. I have wisely brought you home to bed, and you see I am very sleepy, much more sleepy than you are."

" Have you enjoyed yourself ? " asked her father, as he detained her for a parting kiss.

" Oh ! enjoyed myself ! enjoyed myself ! you cannot form an idea how much ! There was a nice little man there."

" A navy officer ? "

" No, a civilian, a sort of pettifogger—he paid me a great deal of attention. I never

wanted to laugh so much. I shall see him again to-night, for sure." She laughed heartily at the recollection of her grotesque admirer. Laughter was as becoming to her beauty as her sweet gravity, and her father could not take his eyes from her.

"Ah, well, go and dream," said he. "Good night!"

"Good night, my adored father; I will tell you all about it to-morrow."

She entered her rose-scented chamber. A moment afterward her maid came out, carrying in her arms the glittering dress, which scintillated in the sombre light of the lowered gas. Monsieur Lemartroy, who had not closed his door, followed with his eyes the garment which had enveloped his daughter, and which was still something of herself.

"Dear child!" he murmured. "What will my life be like when she is gone? Ah, but it will be hard—and yet——" He closed his door and went to bed. But sleep would not come, and he felt himself a prey to an agitation amounting to anguish. After a few minutes'

hesitation he rose, put on some clothing, lighted his gas, and sat down at his desk. He felt himself oppressed by a strange restlessness, of which the approach had been unmistakable. Without wishing to acknowledge it, he had for some days fought against a sickening torpor ; a painful stinging sensation in his limbs, a sort of embarrassment in his ideas, and, above all, an impediment in his speech had troubled him several times.

"If I should be on the verge of an illness," he said suddenly to himself. "If I should be—should be going to die !"

Lemartroy was a brave man, for whom death in itself had no terrors, but he adored his daughter. "I have arranged nothing for Lina's future," thought he. "Without me, what would become of her ?" He took a sheet of stamped paper from his drawer, dipped a pen in the ink, and wrote at the top,

" Testament."

After having traced the first two or three lines in a firm hand he stopped.

Marcelline was eighteen years old ; he could give her her majority, and thus make her free to choose her own destiny. Many times he had weighed this question without daring to decide it ; this time he viewed the things of life with more extraordinary clearness. The confusion in his thoughts, which had troubled him through the day, was changed to a singular painful acuteness which enabled him to take in at a glance the most remote consequences of his resolves.

“No,” said he, half-aloud. “Let her be obliged to wait, to consult, to reflect. She is too young ; she has been too happy ; she has known neither evils nor pain. She must have a guardian with a good wife, who will be capable of taking my place.”

He felt no distress at the thought of death ; the idea of his daughter filled his mind to the exclusion of everything else. Mentally Monsieur Lemartroy passed in review his married friends. The admiral and good Madame Barly came to him as the first thought, but with them he feared that Lina would be inevi-

tably led to marry a man in the navy. How, in the midst of associations exclusively maritime, could she resist the influences of the house? Thinking of his poor young wife, living so often, and so long at a time, alone, the commander felt his heart torn with pity. What bitter tears she must have shed alone when she saw his vessel disappear from the horizon! What sorrowful echoes had the boom of the farewell cannon awakened in her breast! He buried his head in his hands and gave himself up to tender reflections of the dear departed one; nine years gone, never for an instant forgotten, present in all the incidents of his life; present at this moment as he deliberated in regard to the future of their child. "No," said he to the dear apparition which he saw distinctly in his mental vision standing near him, one hand resting upon the desk, just as she used to do when she came to him to have some household difficulty solved; "no, she shall not have a life of regrets and longings like yours, poor dear love! She shall not be consumed in awaiting tardy news from distant lands! She

shall not have to lie in wait for the postman the day after the arrival of the mails from the Indies or other places. She shall live happily and tranquilly if I can compass it—if I can——”

He sobbed. The tears which he had tried to suppress came to his eyes; he forced them back, and when, growing faint, he gave way to his feelings, he found to his dismay that the tears had dried up. A strange oppression cut short his breath, his temples beat like near-by drums a terrible march to which his ears were deaf. Quickly he rose and rushed to the window, where, leaning out, he breathed eagerly. The dawn of a spring day had begun to lighten up the sky, in which the stars had already begun to pale. The neighboring houses came out from the shadows of night and were outlined upon the firmament in misty gray. Upon the trees of a neighboring garden, as well as those of the Parc Monceau, which he could see at the end of the street, a shimmer of golden green quivered among the sap-swollen branches of the trees. The clean pavements seemed like long gray ribbons unwound along the streets.

A short repeated click was heard, and Monsieur Lemartroy saw passing the man who put out the street lights. The street grew darker as the man hurried away, as if pursued by an implacable fate, and the sky became tinged with a pale yellow toward the east.

"A new day," thought Lina's father; "another day, and how many of those who witness its birth will not see its end!"

He tore himself away from the window, from the fresh air which did him so much good, and returned to his desk, where the gaslight was still burning.

"To whom shall I leave her, *mon Dieu*?" he asked himself in anguish, feeling his force of will weaken. All at once a name flashed across his mind, as if his whole brain was illuminated by rapid, repeated, and fleeting sparks, like phosphorescence.

"The Vallencours! the good Vallencours! excellent people, independent fortune, good character—have always wanted a child. They will not refuse, ah! no—and then I haven't the strength to search further—I feel so badly——"

Gathering all his forces, he bent over the paper ; by the open window a fresh breeze entered, making the crimped paper of the pale-green lamp-shade tremble. He wrote rapidly in his beautiful masculine chirography, a little larger perhaps than ordinarily. He stopped, suddenly weary, and raised his head as if imploring aid.

Day advanced rapidly ; in the distance could be heard the rumble of wagons ; the Rue de Prosný, however, still remained buried in sleep. Lemartroy started toward the window, but his legs were so heavy that he could not trust himself upon them. With feverish haste he wrote his name at the bottom of his will, and stopped. The date still remained unwritten. With a super-human effort he again dipped his pen into the ink, and wrote : " Paris, the twenty-second day of March, one thousand eight hundred and eighty-four."

The last letters were so badly formed as to be almost illegible ; heroically he appended the figures necessary to attest the year, and then let the pen drop.

Day entered now, picking out here and there a bright object in the room. Lemartroy had no desire to rise. A lethargy, a kind of stupor which was not altogether unpleasant, possessed both limbs and brain. He did not suffer, but he could scarcely think.

The image of Lina suddenly presented itself to him, as he had seen her a few hours before, in her silver-shot dress, and crowned with jasmynes, her eyes sparkling, and a smile upon her lips. "And yet I must say 'adieu' to her," he thought, confusedly.

His right hand sought the desk and found a pencil. In letters an inch high, crooked, irregular, yet legible, he wrote :

"My dear daughter—" That was all. The pencil slipped from his fingers and rolled under the desk : he sank heavily forward, conscious that this was the end. A smile flitted across his lips, when his head fell upon his arms, extended across the paper where he had just written his last thought. Was it for Lina or for his wife whom he had just seen appear before the eyes of his soul ?



CHAPTER II.

LINA awoke a little after nine o'clock the next morning. In spite of her fondness for balls, thanks, perhaps, to her habit of returning early enough to prevent her father from becoming over-fatigued, she never slept far into the morning. Immediately on ringing for her 'maid, she asked for her father.

"Monsieur is still asleep," replied the maid ;
"mademoiselle always wakes first."

"The lazy man !" thought Lina. "I am going to call him immediately. The doctor charged me particularly not to let him stay in bed too late. You can bring me my chocolate into papa's room," said she aloud.

After having plunged her sweet face into water, she threw on a white woollen dressing-gown, and ran to knock at her father's door. Receiving no reply, and thinking that he still

slept, she turned the knob very quietly. The still burning gas, with its enormous shade, first attracted her attention. The current of air coming in at the open window snatched the door from her hand, and slammed it shut with a bang that shook the whole house. The young girl shivered, and by an instinctive movement turned toward the bed, where she should have found her father, awakened by the noise. With a rapid sweeping glance she took in the empty bed and the occupied chair, the extended arms, the bowed head—he was still sleeping, in spite of the noise.

“Father !” she called, placing her hand upon his shoulder. She touched the ear of Monsieur Lemartroy, and recoiled with a feeling of terror such as she had never before experienced. At the same moment, knocking at the door, and pushing it open with one movement, the chambermaid entered with the tray of chocolate.

“My father !” cried Lina, in a choking voice, for her throat refused utterance to her words. “A doctor ! quick, help !” Cries resounded from all parts of the house, repeated by the

diverse voices of the domestics. The *valet de chambre* ran in all haste to his master, and recoiled when he felt his cold hand. The other servants followed in his wake, but they stopped at the door petrified, crowding one upon another.

"Don't stay here, mademoiselle," said the cook—a woman of some fifty years—who had buried several of her own family, and had served Monsieur Lemartroy fifteen years.

Lina resisted the compassionate hand which would send her away.

"Help!" she cried, her eyes wide with anguish, her lips dry with horror. "A doctor! no matter what one."

"They have gone for one. Come, mademoiselle," said the cook. "But he has fainted. We must revive him."

"Water, salts, something—help me, some of you! He must not be left to die."

The eyes of the domestics followed with profound pity the movements of Lina, who leaned over her father, not daring to take hold of him, but who touched with timid hands his clothing and his hair.

"Look at you ! Are you afraid ? Are you all a set of cowards ?" said she, turning toward them. "He must be carried to his bed ! If you will not do it, help me, at least."

The cook took her by the arm with a movement of authority.

"Do not touch him, mademoiselle ; leave him where he is, it will be better."

"But he will strangle ! Oh !"

She took her father's head in her hands, and the chill of the contact thrilled her—she recoiled.

"Come, my poor lady, let us go."

"No, no," said she, positively ; "you do not mean to say—it cannot be—he is not dead ?"

That word struck her own ear with horror. She could not touch again that which had given her such a frightful impression.

"He is not dead," she faltered, looking at him with unutterable tenderness. "People don't die that way so quickly. He opened the window, you see ; he wanted air, he has only fainted."

"Go away, all of you," whispered the cook to

the terrified servants. "I must get her away, and while you stay there, she will not come. Only leave the door open." They slipped silently away, glad to be delivered from the sight.

The brave woman, drying her eyes upon her white apron, approached the corpse and kneeled before it.

Lina observed the act with haggard eyes, still incredulous.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen!" said the servant, making the sign of the cross.

"Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord——"

"No, no, no," cried Lina, covering her ears with her hands; "not that, not the Prayer for the Dead. Oh, papa!"

She glided up to him, sinking upon the carpet, her face buried in his clothing; she felt then the tears rush forth like a great wave, breaking all bounds. With a cry, she gave vent to her sobs and wept without restraint.

"You see, now, he is dead, the poor gentle-

man, for he says nothing to console you," said the cook, who had arisen and leaned over her. "I have lost those whom I loved, I have shrouded them with my own hands, and I know what it is. Come, let us go, my poor lady. You must not be here when the people come."

She lifted Lina in her maternal arms and led her to her chamber. The young girl made no resistance. Between the hired servant and the heiress, at that moment, there was no social distance ; there was only a weeping orphan, and a childless widow consoling her.





CHAPTER III.

AFTER the confusion and the horror of the morning, the afternoon was dreadfully calm.

The legal process had been gone through with : the physician had not appeared astonished at this sudden termination of a disease which for a long time had left no hope of cure.

"I have foreseen," said he, "that Monsieur Lemartroy would be taken with a serious attack of apoplexy ; he might have lingered some days in cruel suffering, especially cruel for those who should witness it. I consider this closing of his life, as it was inevitable, a happy one under the circumstances."

At once upon hearing the news, Monsieur and Madame Barly had come. The admiral took charge of all the sad duties of the occasion. The will open upon the table, and the paper

upon which Lemartroy had endeavored to leave a last evidence of tenderness for his daughter, attracted his attention.

"My poor friend!" he murmured, as he read the three words traced with such an unsteady hand.

The reading of the will gave him a painful surprise. "The Vallencours!" he exclaimed, knitting his brow. "It isn't possible! he must have meant to write my name and made a mistake. The Vallencours! Worthy people, altogether respectable but of no force, and consummate landlubbers. They have probably never even seen the sea. Lemartroy surely could not have meant to confide his daughter to them! They were not intimate!" For a quarter of an hour the admiral continued to ruminate upon his discontent, into which entered a shade of jealousy.

"Well," said he, "I will notify them of it, all the same. It is dated and signed, all in order; there is no exception to be made to it. Poor little Lina! only last evening she laughed and sang as she led him so prettily for the last time.

The doctor was perhaps right in saying it is better thus ; but, all the same, it is very sudden. She must come to us to spend a few days at least ; my wife knows how to nurse the sick and to console the afflicted. It is her proper business. And, besides, this poor child cannot stay here."

As the admiral went to rejoin his wife, who was closeted with the orphan, a bell rang ; the *valet de chambre*, naturally approaching him, presented the card of Monsieur and Madame Valencour.

"Already?" growled the old sailor. "They have been informed. Whoever has done it has lost no time!"

He received them, nevertheless, with sincere cordiality. The sorrow of those two good "landlubbers" was so unaffected and natural that he could not but be touched by it. After their first words, he saw plainly that they had come voluntarily, as soon as they heard from their servants of the catastrophe.

"You know, perhaps," said he, with a little air of suspicion, "that you have been appointed guardian?"

"I guardian?" exclaimed Monsieur Vallencour, with a start of astonishment.

"Yes. It is singular, is it not?"

Madame Vallencour, who had not quite understood, said timidly: "Guardian—my husband—of Marcelline? Why? It seems to me that you——"

"Does it not, dear madame?" replied the admiral, much pleased.

Monsieur Vallencour was not quick of thought, but he thought with judgment.

"I see how it is," said he, slowly. "Lemartroy did not wish his daughter to marry a seaman. He has told me so a hundred times——"

"He has proclaimed it to all the world," interrupted the admiral, curtly.

"Therefore it is quite natural that he has not left her in your charge," concluded Monsieur Vallencour.

Monsieur Barly, a little disconcerted, said no more.

"Where is the poor child?" asked Madame Vallencour.

"In her chamber, with my wife. She is very

much overcome, as you may suppose. All last evening, during the ball, I was thinking of another orphan, a stranger, whose history that unfortunate Lemartroy had recounted to me, and whose misfortune was even harder to bear. It was like a presentiment ; yet who would have believed it ? ”

“ Poor child ! ” murmured the good lady, her eyes suffused with tears. “ I cannot express the sorrow I feel for her.”

“ Would you like to see her ? ” asked the admiral, with sudden importance. “ After all, since it is you to whom she has been given——”

“ No, no ! ” said she, interrupting him with a gesture. “ Do not disturb her. She is with Madame Barly ; leave them to themselves. Good friends as we are, she does not know me so well, and it is very natural—I have no child, while with your young daughters, she is among her own kind, and your wife is so motherly.”

The admiral was touched by the good sense and the simplicity of Madame Vallencour. He

pulled a little at his whiskers, then he cleared his throat :

“In a few days from now we can arrange things for the best. The most important thing to be done—is it not?—is to take care of poor Lina. We will take her at once to our house, and from there she will go to you. She must not return here—for a long time, at least.”

Monsieur and Madame Vallencour having approved this plan, the friends busied themselves with the sad details of necessary preparation ; then the guardian and his wife returned home to meditate upon the unforeseen stroke which had given them the long-desired child.

A kind of stupor dominated all other feelings, while a secret apprehension was mingled with their sympathy for the orphan. These new duties, this charge of which they had had no thought even at their morning waking, had so suddenly fallen upon their shoulders that they were all confused and dismayed.

No doubt their personal fortune, their undisputed respectability, the sociability of their hab-

its and characters, would render less onerous than many others would have felt it, the charge of watching over a young girl and arranging for her marriage ; but the timid souls of the worthy but simple people looked with dismay upon the responsibility of the future. Suppose, in their hurry, they were to marry her too hastily or unwisely ? Or, on the other hand, by an exaggerated sense of duty, suppose they should refuse the man best calculated to make Lina happy ?

“ Do you want me to tell you ? ” said Monsieur Vallencour, after listening to the fears and objections of his wife. “ All that will come later, in its own time ; for the present, we have only to attend to one thing—bring the poor child home and try to console her. She is young, and, in spite of all the affection she had for her father, her grief will cure itself in time. It is to that end that we must use all our efforts, and I think, my dear, that you will not find much trouble in your part of it, for I know of no one better than yourself.”

Madame Vallencour dried her eyes and gave

her husband a look full of gratitude. During the twenty-five years of their married life she had never learned to look upon a compliment coming from that quarter in any other light than as an unmerited recompense. And yet, opportunities of familiarizing herself with that heavenly manna had not been rare, for Monsieur Vallencour, on his part, had never taken it upon himself to look upon any other woman but in the light of a comparison immeasurably in the favor of his wife.

This extraordinary couple, less extraordinary perhaps than many would believe, accustomed to the ways of a more vain or more corrupted world, had found means to live in the midst of a select circle, giving dinners and making social evening calls, seeing popular plays and all that, without going out from their own moral Arcadia. And people of that kind are less rare than is generally admitted—those who prefer their own fireside and their life's companion. It is well so, otherwise our country, such as *soi-disant* moralists describe it (better designated as *immoralists*), would have been long ago impover-

ished by its debaucheries, while its frugality astonishes its enemies.

The great question which from the first appeared to be disposed of, was that of residence. That of the Vallencour couple, large and convenient as it really was for their own accommodation, could not furnish a single room spacious and elegant enough for an heiress to two millions. What was to be done?

Lina settled that question without the least difficulty. Pressed by Madame Barly the evening of the fatal day to go home with her, for some days at least, she refused, positively and decidedly, to leave the house.

"Fear?" she replied to the entreaties of her friends. "Afraid to pass one or two nights more near him whom I have loved more than all else in the world? It would be the veriest cowardice on my part to leave my poor father, however much others may wish to leave." She would listen to no persuasion; Madame Barly then offered to stay with her, but that proposition met with the same refusal. While warmly thanking her old friend, she refused the sacrifice of her rest.

"Marianne will be sufficient company for me," said she. "She is only a cook, but she saw my mother die, and she has buried many who were dear to her. She has no more fear than I have of our vigil."

"But," cried Madame Barly, at a loss for further arguments, and allowing her innermost thought to appear, "it must not be. It is contrary to all custom, contrary to all propriety!"

Lina gazed at her with her deep, dark eyes, which quailed not before those of the admiral's wife.

"Allow me to say to you, dear and good lady, when my conscience is at ease, the impropriety of one or another thing will never shake my resolution. That is one of the lessons of life which my father has taught me."

She had been too short a time an orphan for the remembrance of Monsieur Lemartroy thus called up, not to evoke a flood of tears. In view of her distress, Madame Barly desisted from further tormenting her. She retired, and, as a sacrifice to the proprieties and as an offering of friendship, it is proper to say, she sent the ad-

miral to pass the night near the corpse, with the priest and the nun. Marianne, couched upon a mattress on the floor, would not leave her young mistress, assuring herself thus that she could not at least expose herself to useless emotion by going into the chamber of death.

Lina had not the energy to insist, had she attempted it. In spite of the courage of her brave young spirit, her body refused to carry out her will. When, on the following morning, after a feverish night broken by long periods of wakefulness, she wished to rise, she had not the power. The physician commanded complete repose, and at the cost of a falsehood, aided by a strong dose of chloral, he spared her the horrors of a last adieu. When the orphan awoke from a long and heavy sleep, her father was already reposing near her mother in the family vault in the cemetery of Montmartre.

After a first explosion of grief and anger, the young girl understood that her friends had done well to spare her, and she thanked them therefor.

Meeting them in the great parlor of the mansion, where she had seen them so often pass de-

lightful hours with their lost friend, she received them with a touching gravity. Her whole young and lovely being seemed to appeal to them ; she was now alone in the world, and who could live without affection ?

So deeply moved that he could scarcely articulate his words, the admiral made her acquainted with the terms of her father's will, and at the same time handed her the paper upon which the failing hand had added a last word of affection.

"Cry, my darling, cry," murmured Madame Vallencour. Seeing Lina turn away her face, she went to her and took her in her arms.

The young girl gazed at her who was henceforth to replace the mother whom she had missed for the last nine years. Upon that good and loving face, ennobled by the gravity of the situation and of the time, she read so complete an abnegation, so great a forgetfulness of everything but her orphaned grief, that she felt complete confidence at once and forever. She threw her arms about the neck of her friend and rested her head upon her shoulder, as if she had found there her refuge.

The material questions did not require long to arrange : the fortune of Monsieur Lemartroy, clear and sure, was safe from all fluctuations.

"You will come to live with me ?" said Lina to Madame Vallencour.

The latter, taken by surprise, for she had not dreamed of such a thing, could not reply.

"It is the only possible thing," continued the orphan. "I know that I am asking of you a sacrifice in making you leave your beautiful home and your settled habits, but I assure you that I could not live anywhere but here, without great grief. My father had this house built himself ; he overlooked the arrangements with so much pleasure. I remember well how he used to bring me to see the progress of the work, and the feast which we two gave ourselves alone, when we came to take possession. Here it will not seem as if my father had gone ; and then, that room in which he thought of me ! No, I pray you, do not take me away from here ; I should die of grief."

She was so pitiful in her mourning garb, with her dark-circled tearful eyes and pallid face,

that Madame Vallencour could not say no. It was agreed that the couple should still retain their present dwelling, and that three rooms should be furnished for them in the mansion—those that Monsieur Lemartroy had reserved until the time when his daughter should marry, and when the young household should be established. During the few days which should intervene meanwhile, Lina would still occupy the dwelling alone with her father's servants; she had refused the offer of Marianne to sleep by her, if not in her room, at least in her dressing-room.

“I must accustom myself to being alone,” she replied.

The installation of Monsieur and Madame Vallencour took place in the quietest manner in the world; no one would have supposed they were in the house, so little time had been required, and so little stir made. The admiral, who had viewed the change of residence with a touch of jealousy, returned home after it was accomplished.

“From the bottom of my heart, I am quite satisfied that it is not I who have been charged

with the care of Lina. Imagine us removed with our six daughters into the Lemartroy mansion ! ”

“ It would have been impossible,” replied Madame Barly, with a half-smile.

“ Since she would not leave it, we should have had to do it. She is a young miss who is not going to be easily controlled, and I assure you we have quite enough of our own. I cannot sufficiently thank my poor friend for having spared us that—” He was going to say “ that task,” but he stopped in time, and finished the sentence with the word “ mission,” which made all right.

“ And yet,” observed Madame Barly, “ she is the sweetest, best, most obliging child that can be.”

“ I don't deny it,” retorted the admiral ; “ but with all her sweetness she has done nothing but have her own way in everything since her father's death. She stayed by him in spite of all the proprieties, and she has made those poor Vallencours move to suit her. She is a charming child, but I am a fool, or she will lead them a pretty dance.”



CHAPTER IV.

FIVE months had passed since the death of Monsieur Lemartroy, and his daughter began to take some pleasure in life. The elasticity of youth had brought her the involuntary enjoyments of eye and ear. Little by little she had begun to see in flowers something besides offerings upon the cherished tomb ; and music, of which she was passionately fond, had ceased to bring tears. Her guardian had taken her to the seaside upon the quiet coast of Brittany, where her mourning would not be incongruous, and where, nevertheless, there was some one to talk to.

Monsieur and Madame Vallencour had tried at times Trouville, Dieppe, and Dinard, like everybody else. Without crying *raca* at those places of perdition, they had agreed between themselves that they were no places for them,

and that one where they could escape the "ponies" would be much nearer their ideal. They had found this ideal, and every year they returned with new pleasure, renewed enjoyment.

It was a broad sandy beach, with here and there a few black rocks, upon which the ocean spread the rippling fringes of its great swell. Right and left, the shore rose in gentle slopes until it reached the far-off headland ; the land, almost down to the shore, was clothed with grass and flowers ; deep paths led among hawthorn hedges, overtopped with branching oaks and ash ; little rivulets stole gently down to the sand, concealed for the greater part of their course by watercress and myosotis. It was a charming, quiet spot, made for repose of mind and eye.

The guests were in complete harmony with the place. They were for the most part professors or merchants of Nantes and Angers, or even from the interior of Brittany. Profiting by some holiday, they came to establish their little families to spend two or three months,

and returned to their business. Husbands would be seen coming down by the train on Saturdays, and then the beach would assume a specially patriarchal air. Young wives would promenade with serious and satisfied expression by the side of their lords and masters ; children ran before, and returned again, ever and anon, to cling to the arms or legs of papa ; everybody talked louder and laughed louder, and the odor of cigars floated at nightfall upon the shingle, where the urchins were playing at fort-building. That, at least, had been the aspect of the beach in preceding years. On bringing her charge to the place, Madame Vallencour realized that her Eden had somewhat changed. A glaring new casino had arisen, like a great angular mushroom, in the prettiest locality. It was a wooden building, a simple, one-storied structure, which smelled still of Norway pitch, upon the outside of which the painters were having a trial of skill, while the carpenters within were driving nails with noisy vigor.

“Adieu to our pretty resort !” cried Madame Vallencour, with a sigh.

"Why?" asked her husband.

"Because Parisians will now come here."

Monsieur Vallencour laughed outright.

"You can stand them very well in Paris," replied he, philosophically.

"That is not the same thing. At Paris they are at home. Away from home they are insupportable."

"But, my dear, these Parisians—we are the same kind of Parisians," remarked the worthy man.

"We are Parisians by birth," retorted the lady, "but we are not of the Parisian race, who may be recognized the moment they land, no matter where. It is that kind that I do not like. Well, after all——"

"They will not eat us," concluded Monsieur Vallencour. "And then, all this expense, painting and furnishing, is, perhaps, done for us, Anais! We well deserve it all, after the six years that we have faithfully stuck by the place. And for me, I am not sorry to see a little youthful dancing."

Lina was disturbed neither by the casino

nor by the Parisians. For the first time in her life she was upon the shores of the ocean, and she found there enough to occupy her whole time. With her mother she had formerly lived near Toulon, in a villa whose terraced garden looked upon the Mediterranean, and that strip of blue horizon, so beautiful, had left upon her memory nothing but an impression of something luminous and gay, with no feeling of nearness; the sea was merely a part of the surrounding decoration—it was never her friend. Here the sea gave to Lina twice each day veritable emotion. She would never tire of following the retreating waves, or of fleeing from the advancing billows as they broke upon the sands. The black rocks, so high and wide when left bare by the retreating tide, so small and sharp at high water, gave her continually new surprises. She could not accustom herself to the deserted and death-like morning aspect of the shore which she had left at evening sparkling in the moonlight, like an immense cup full of diamonds; and if she saw suddenly a high sea beating with its full force upon the pebbly beach, she

was startled as if she had received its force upon her person.

This seaman's daughter knew almost nothing of the sea. Upon renouncing his career, his life-work, Monsieur Lemartroy had abstained from speaking of it to his daughter. Not that he displayed therein the least affectation, but in the fear of seeing her marry a sailor, he had instinctively kept out of her sight, plays and books which might interest the young mind of his child in that direction. Reflecting thereupon, Lina perceived how little she knew of her father's life beyond his love for herself. It would seem that he had begun a new life, altogether one of family interests, the day that he was left alone with the care of the little motherless child. She interrogated Monsieur Vallengour, who was directly the opposite of a seaman, but he admired all that was great and respectable. He recounted to his ward the career of the Commandant Lemartroy, his energy, his bravery; she learned how he had been decorated, and also why he had quit the service so young.

She wept at the thought that she had learned these facts too late for her to show to the poor deceased her appreciation and filial admiration ; but there was in the idea that she was the daughter of such a man, a sublime and consoling sense of joy.

She was delighted with her guardian for having spoken of her father with such respectful and tender sympathy ; and the worthy man, who until then had seemed to her a little dull, almost stupid, appeared in her eyes now in a new and very different light.

The arrival of the omnibus of the principal hotel was a little event, of which the daily repetition never failed to interest the population of the country. The number and quality of the travellers was an affair of great importance ; and the commotion was considerable the day when Madame Barly alighted from the vehicle, accompanied by her eldest daughter and a young man whom, under his citizen's dress, it was impossible not to recognize as an officer of the navy.

Madame Vallencour, being immediately ap-

prised, hastened with Lina to meet them. The two young ladies, delighted to meet again, embraced each other as a preliminary ceremony, after which Madame Barly introduced her nephew.

"Georges Tracy," said she, as he made obeisance. "He knows this country through and through. It is he who suggested to me the idea of our calling to see you, Cecile and I. We have been as far as Brest, to accompany my husband, who embarked yesterday. Georges assured us that we could not do a better thing than return by this route to Paris, before going to Switzerland. But I did not know how to thread my way among all these little railroads, and I asked him to show us the way."

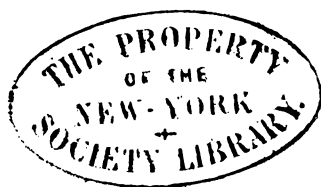
"Mr. Tracy has done well, and I thank him for it," said Lina, glancing at the young man with a smile of recognition.

"I was already rewarded, mademoiselle," replied he with a quiet grace, which added a great charm to his grave and seemingly rather cold exterior.

"But," said Lina, who had regarded him



MADAM BARLEY INTRODUCED HER NEPHEW.



with some attention, "had I not the pleasure of meeting you one evening at the ball——"

A fugitive blush came to her face, and she turned away her head. Upon recalling the circumstance, it had occurred to her that that ball was the last which she had attended, and which had had no to-morrow. Tracy said nothing. She then understood that he had wished to remain incognito, to be introduced as one unknown to her, so as to avoid recalling that sad event if possible, and she was grateful to him for his delicacy.

"We will go on our way to-morrow," said Madame Barly; "for to-night, we belong to you body and soul."

It was a delightful evening. After fifteen days of comparative silence, consummate Parisians as were Monsieur and Madame Vallencour, in spite of their protestations, they were enchanted to meet again friends who could talk with them about everything with which they were familiar. The two young ladies had a thousand things to say, and Tracy gazed at them as one looks at flowers or birds, or anything else delightful and fresh.

Lina drew her friend a little aside.

"That gentleman is your cousin," said she.

"Is he not also, in a measure, your *fiancé*?"

"I! oh, no, indeed! I will never marry a sailor. It is enough to have a father always on the go. That poor father! he sailed yesterday; we shall see him again at Toulon six weeks from now for twenty-four or forty-eight hours, and after that, God knows when! Georges will look for a wife who likes to live alone!"

"Seeing him with your mother and yourself," replied Lina, "I thought——"

"But he is our general escort. Mamma is made for a sailor's wife about as much as I am; she knows nothing of sea life, and she has spent her life running over France between Brest and Toulon. Georges is on leave at present, and papa has charged him to watch over our nest. He is a brother—brother of six young ladies. I assure you that he has not much idle time. But he is such a good boy!"

"I cannot imagine," said Lina, "how it happens that I have never seen him before."

"He was at sea; that answers all questions, you

know. Papa took him when he was very young, quite a baby, to make a sailor of him ; it seems that one cannot begin too early. He is the son of his favorite sister. My uncle died young ; he was not a sailor—a magistrate. My aunt never had good health. Georges is said to be of a very independent disposition. I don't know, myself ; I have always found him gentle as a lamb. But it must be said that I have had nothing to do with his education, and for cause——”

“How old is he ?”

“Twenty-seven. They say he is going very far away. So much the better. In the meantime, he has twice been round the world, and he will begin again in six months. Is he not handsome ? For me, I love him with all my heart.”

Lina made no reply to this declaration of principles. Tracy pleased her instinctively, but the dear Cecile rattled on like a giddy pate, and her judgments were not to be accepted without verification. Lina promised herself to examine this model cousin, and to assure herself whether he merited her esteem. The time was short for

forming an opinion ; the evening passed off without event ; on the morrow at daylight the visitors resumed their journey, with positive promises to meet each other in Paris. Tracy's last glance rested upon Lina, who, standing upon the stairs, waved her handkerchief in farewell. In the white light of the morning she was as fair as the dawn itself ; her grand beauty feared neither air nor sunshine ; a smile lit up her pure complexion and her black eyes, as lovable, as attractive as the tea-roses which entwined the porch above her head.

"What a charming person your cousin is !" said he to Cecile, when she was lost to view.

"Adorable," she replied. "Just the woman for you, Georges !"

He made a slight movement, which might have been in assent, and which might also have expressed only surprise ; then he propped himself in his corner and gazed out silently upon the landscape.



CHAPTER V.

ARISTIDE BELLET had been sitting more than an hour with paper before him. Twenty times he had dipped his pen in the ink, rearranged the paper, begun a word, and even written a line ; but the inspiration came not. He put away his penholder with an air of disgust and went to the window ; he pressed his face against the glass and drummed a slow little march. What he saw was not calculated to inspire gayety. The rain fell without, streaking a perspective of roofs which glistened as if they had been showered upon from a shot-tower. A great cloud of black smoke arose sluggishly from a high forge chimney and fell upon the neighboring houses, scattered by the wind into thin ribbons. The odor of bituminous coal came through the ill-closed window. Aristide left the window and resumed his seat at the table. The interior was not much

more agreeable than the exterior. The scrupulous neatness of the room and the furniture made more conspicuous the scantiness of the latter, which, unfortunately for him, was not only ugly and rickety, but was quite pretentious.

The bedstead was of figured mahogany; a troubadour clock ornamented the mantelpiece: the cotton counterpane was of a loud pattern, and the clock had stopped. The chairs of black hair-cloth, such as they made forty years ago, were worn to the last degree possible; but, in view of that fact, one could not help making the calculation how many dress skirts and how many pairs of pantaloons they had exterminated before reaching such a pass. It was not the abode of poverty; it was that of irretrievable mediocrity.

Aristide looked at his erasures and blots as if it had been the fault of the paper. With an effeminate hand he fingered a yellow-covered book upon the corner of the desk; then replaced it with a kind of precaution, as if he were afraid of injuring it. That book was his only pride, and a factor in all the troubles of his father.

Aristide was born of an honest employee and

his wife, who was a renovator of India shawls. Their modest home had been well kept by the care of Madame Bellet, who was of a crooked disposition, but whose thrift was legendary in all the neighborhood. Never had anybody seen floors so well waxed, furniture so well dusted; the wrought-iron saucepans glistened in the kitchen, and the windows were so clear that they seemed to be without glass.

Little Aristide had been the pet of this shining abode. The only spot upon this sun was the prodigious quantity of shoes he wore out annually; and worse yet, the quantity of mud brought into the house upon those shoes. The five stories that he had to mount before reaching his parents' quarters seemed to augment rather than diminish that unwelcome commodity; otherwise, the child gave a great deal of satisfaction to his parents. Educated at the public school, he soon won his diploma; his father then entered him at the *École Turgot*, in the hope of making a good accountant or something of that sort; but when near sixteen years of age he found an unexpected vocation.

Aristide was not a laborious worker ; he belonged to that class who work when they cannot help it, and who then, thanks to their intelligence, outstrip their more conscientious but less gifted comrades.

Having the reputation of a poor scholar, he made once in a while a brilliant stroke which raised him to the level of those well educated, and disconcerted the professors. Among his comrades he picked out one who was for him a source of much satisfaction. Leopold de Favieres was the son of a popular portrait painter, much sought after because of his knack of giving a pleasing expression to the most forbidding features. Monsieur de Favieres had tried to discover in his little boy, the tastes which foreshadow a future painter. What future could be predicted more brilliant than that ? Would not these young women, made so attractive by his pencil, be forced in fifteen or sixteen years to bring their daughters to the son of an artist who had so well represented *them* ? And in the interim, must not a whole generation of charming women and delightful babies glide in-

sensibly from under the pencil of the father to that of the son, provided he should develop the least particle of talent? But destiny had reversed projects so natural and so sweet. Leopold, more familiarly called Leo, had no more talent for painting than he had for eloquence. He was an excellent boy, full of good points, but in regard to art, incomprehensibly refractory. His father, despairing of making a painter, had wished to make a lawyer of him. Leo mixed himself up so wretchedly in his talk, with such a profusion of absurd metaphors and borrowed ideas, such unfinished explanations, that the very idea of hearing him attempt to plead some day made Monsieur de Favieres' hair stand on end.

"Well," said the disappointed father, "you shall be a merchant, a banker, no matter what—something where figures are used, for I have a horror of idlers; and that which is called a liberal profession, unless one has a veritable talent, is only a pretext for doing nothing." But, changing his mind, he cried, "Would you like to be a doctor?"

"Oh, no, papa," cried Leo, whose proper

vocation his father felt sadly was to do nothing.

"Then you will enter the École Turgot, and when you leave there, I have some friends who will find a position for you in some good business."

Leo gave tacit consent ; in general, he cared not what was done with him, provided he was not required to do anything himself. And he was sailing with a very diminutive spread of canvas toward the future which his father had laid out for him, when Aristide Bellet became his classmate.

With an astonishing instinct which took the place of sagacity, Aristide discovered whatever in life would spare himself labor or be of use to him. He saw at once how he could profit by a close friendship with the son of a celebrated artist, rich, living in style, receiving at his house all in Paris who bore a name known in art and literature. Surmounting without effort his native laziness, he proposed to Leo to help him with his studies, and he was really of considerable assistance.

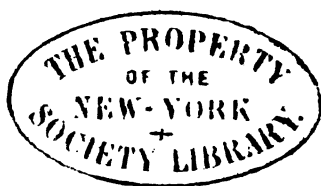
After leaving the Turgot School the young

men continued to see each other frequently. Leo would have allowed their intimacy to drop, from indifference, had his friend not kept it up with an energy of will sometimes very great. After the first two or three years, when youthful friendships are usually either confirmed or evaporated, Aristide had become the indispensable complement of Leo, and Madame de Favieres would not have been able to arrange a soirée without such a precious auxiliary.

Aristide recited poetry ; Aristide found chairs when there were no more seats to be found for the ladies ; Aristide found appliances for the charades, and found partners for the plain girls. But all that did not give him social position, anywhere outside of the soirées of the good Madame de Favieres, who was growing old and did not keep up the same interest in her social relations. Young Bellet had only found one place of employment—in the gas-works—where he was hard worked and poorly paid. He made enough to keep him alive, but not enough upon which to make a figure. So, as he would be something, he became a poet. That is to say,

he made verses ; and as that was not a profession which was personal only to himself, he made verses all but incomprehensible, which he christened with a mysterious name. An uncle having left him a few hundred francs, he had made for himself a black coat and published his book under the title of " Ambient Fragrances," with a yellow cover. That truly original idea opened at once to him the door of several little coteries, composed each of three or four young men like himself.

What seemed to him as very striking, and yet was not such an extraordinary thing, was that the members of these cliques quarrelled abominably among themselves at first, and afterward each group daily tore to pieces the neighboring groups. If Aristide had had any need of learning to abuse his neighbor he could have perfected himself there ; but he had acquired naturally, and without effort, the art of using skilful insinuations, which exempted him from the necessity of resorting to more violent but less sure means. By dint of writing here and there in the small journals, Bellet had come



at last to insinuate himself into two or three of the larger ones. He had published some verses in a paper of wide circulation ; two little novels had found grace in the eyes of an all-powerful editor. All that did not constitute celebrity, but almost what might be called renown in certain quarters : when he entered certain ale-houses, the word was passed, "There is Aristide Bellet," and he felt flattered.

What he was in search of was a good match. In fact, he had worked for that alone, from the first time he had helped Leo with a tardy lesson. The years had come and gone, but the marriage had come not ; Aristide was now thirty-four, and no heiress had yet consented to prefer him to every other man. Occasionally he met with intense mortification upon the quays. In some twenty-centime book-stall, among old medical brochures, forgotten formulas of deceased apothecaries, he would find a yellow-covered volume, with leaves uncut—which was the crowning outrage—an unlucky copy of "*Fragrances Ambiantes*," which seemed to reproach him for having brought it into the world.

Then it was that Aristide gave way again to ill humor. His mother allowed him to growl, thinking on her part that she was not a bad growler herself, and that in their badly balanced republic it was for each in turn to annoy the other. Madame Bellet had sought with so much ardor for the coveted heiress, that often she fancied she had found her, but lost her again. She imagined to herself several times that her son should have married Miss This or That, and that those marriages only fell through because of envious villains' conspiracies against the dear boy. These abortive marriages were not altogether in her own imagination; that of Aristide had some part in them. And, indeed, it cannot be said with certainty that their combined imaginations were altogether the inventors. There had been, not marriages, but evidences of inclination purely interested on the part of the young man, and innocently compassionate on the part of the young girls, but no one knows how a cruel father or mother had interfered with the match. Some months after, Monsieur Aristide Bellet had always received a letter of

invitation to be present at a wedding of his heiress with a more favored man.

There were some things at the bottom of it, Madame Bellet would say to the concierge: "There must have been something at the bottom of it; for, indeed, otherwise how can one understand that a fine boy, handsome and intelligent as my son—and who writes poetry, madame—verses which he repeats at the *salons*, among rich people—see the grass cut from under his feet by a crew of people who are no match for him?" The concierge did not dispute the fact. Madame Bellet paid her rent regularly and never went in debt to the grocer, which gained for her the esteem of her quarter. Aristide, of course, was ignorant of these maternal confidences, and went about the house with an absorbed air which gave him the name of being "a little proud."

He was recalling to mind all these memories, while his hand distractedly fumbled the volume of poems that always lay upon the table which served him for desk; an expression of ill-humor disfigured the lower features of his face

and contracted his already too closely set eyebrows. He stood before a small glass near the window, and viewed himself, not without a degree of complaisance.

His mother was right. Aristide was a handsome young man : blue eyes, not too large, but of a fine color, deeply set in their orbits, gave to him, when he would, an air of youthful frankness very valuable to one of his age ; his rather large mouth was hidden by a beard of a chestnut, almost blond hue, always well kept and elegant ; his forehead was high and intelligent ; his hair black, slightly curling, gave an originality to his face. As he looked at himself he was pleased with his good looks, and a smile which he made no effort to repress disclosed his superb teeth. But he frowned again immediately.

“And to think that with it all, I have not been able to catch a single one !” reflected he irreverently. One would have thought that he was looking for larks in the glass. It was only heiresses, but, in his idea, they were a very similar sort of birds.

“What do they hear, what is done to them

that they fly away the moment when they should engage themselves? With my little Blanche, I was on the point of success. With Calette—with——”

He did not finish the list, but heaved a deep sigh, then returned to the desk where lay the odious inkstand and the inimical paper.

“If I could only write a bright article,” said he to himself, “a short story which would earn me a louis—a louis with which I could go to some entertainment. I am devoured with ennui! Everybody is in mourning this winter; they seem to put it on on purpose. And Bazoché is intractable since he is working on credit.”

The door opened and Madame Bellet entered with her nose in the air. She was a large, common-looking woman, with a designing eye and sinister smile.

Was it necessarily respectable poverty which had set upon her the seal of self-flattery, or had she received it in the cradle as the first gift of her fairy godmother? It did nobody any harm; her son suffered little from it.

"Here is an invitation for you, Aristide," said she. "It is from Monsieur de Favieres, who gives a little, select soirée. The letter was not sealed, and I read it as I came upstairs."

The young man took the letter without thanks, and looked at the envelope. A little moisture in the adhesive gum betrayed Madame Bellet. The letter had been imperfectly closed, and his mamma had opened it to read.

"You cannot make me believe," said he, without ceremony, "that people put their letters in the mail with a five-cent stamp without sealing. Look, it shows where it was sealed. Do me the favor not to read my letters, mamma, if you do not wish me to go and keep bachelor's hall."

"That would be much too expensive," replied Madame Bellet, without flinching. "And then, when I tell you that I have not broken the seal! Is it for next Sunday, or for to-day?"

"It is for to-day," he replied, looking at the letter. "They might as well have invited me to dinner while they were about it."

"That might, perhaps, have made thirteen at table," said Madame Bellet, philosophically. "I

have a good fillet of veal ; you will not be badly provided for. Come, I am going to prepare a nice white shirt and your black coat."

"That's it, and for me, I will take a turn in the wine-shop," said Aristide, putting on his paletot.

"Don't stay too late," cried the big lady, as he descended the stairs. The distant voice of Aristide replied, while he groped his way down the dark and badly lighted staircase: "It will be soon enough, for all the pleasure I shall have."





CHAPTER VI.

MADAME DE FAVIERES exercised all her good graces toward Mademoiselle Lemartroy. Seated close by the young lady's chair, she explained by the card the origin and importance of the works of art with which the studio was peopled. Lina could not doubt that the dinner had been prepared for her, in order that Monsieur de Favieres might know her better before commencing a large portrait of her, and more to give Leo the opportunity to begin assiduous attentions, which might end, please God, in a wedding.

Madame Vallencour greatly admired the talent of Favieres ; a portrait by him seemed to her the pinnacle of elegance. Her fortune had been made at a time when the delicacy of her pretty face was transformed into bonhomie, and when, as she told them herself, she no longer felt any desire to leave to her nieces and nephews the

embarrassing picture of a woman made like everybody else.

But the pure features of her ward could not escape the conquering pencil which had left to posterity so many agreeable physiognomies ; and after six months of mourning she had persuaded Lina to sit for her portrait.

From that to marrying Leo there was a long way to go, but the imagination of Madame de Favieres had cleared it at a bound. To marry off Leo was the dream of her life, but he felt little interest in her scheme. Contrary to his friend Aristide, who had no other desire, the brave boy fled from any insinuation of matrimony ; he had a way of foiling the maternal machinations which were made on the part of the young ladies of his acquaintance.

"See here," he would say to them in confidence, at the third interview, "would it not be nice if we could always be friends like this ? We talk, I make you laugh, then I ask you to dance, and you accept. Afterward I bring you to the buffet, and I swear that I will procure an ice for you, when to do that it would be necessary to

thrust two or three butlers in a bucket of champagne. Well, when I have done all that to make myself agreeable to you, mademoiselle, your mamma will say to you, 'That Monsieur Leopold de Favieres' (remark that she will call me Leopold, which is an unwarranted aggravation), 'how do you like him?' Suppose then, mademoiselle, that you reply, 'I don't know, mamma, I have not noticed him especially.' Then they will imagine that you have noticed me, and everybody will talk to you about me, until you have a perfect horror of me. Some will tell you that I have a bad heart; others, that I have ruined my family; yet others, that I have a pimple on my nose. And you can make yourself perfectly sure, at this moment, that they are calumnies; but by force of hearing it repeated you will come to believe it, and you will say to me, when I humbly beseech a waltz, 'I am engaged, sir,' in a little dry tone, which will make chills run down my back; while, if you will only say to your good-hearted and intelligent mother, 'That gentleman! Oh! I will never marry him; in the first place, his name is Leopold, and that is enough.' No-

body would speak to you of me, and we should be such good friends. We would dance together, and I could always take you to supper, and you would marry a gentleman whose name is not Leopold ; only I ask of you the honor of being your page."

This language, adroitly modified according to circumstances, had succeeded beyond belief. The number of weddings at which Leo had served as 'best man,' at his own request, was incredible. And poor Madame de Favieres remarked to her friends, at her Thursday afternoons, in a melancholy tone : " Really, I do not understand it ; Leo is fascinating, the young girls dote on him, he talks to them in tête-à-têtes aside, and one would suppose that everything was arranged between them ; and then they marry somebody else, and he seems delighted."

"My poor little mother," said the culprit, clapping his hands, when that excellent woman expressed her uneasiness upon the subject, "my good little mother, console yourself, for my hour has not yet come."

Leo's hour did not seem very near this even-

ing ; during the dinner, placed near Mademoiselle Lemartroy, he had been as agreeable as possible, but afterward he had *wilted*, so to speak. His mother saw him, sometimes reduced to a state of collapse, quietly retire into a corner of the studio, then disappear in the hangings behind an easel, without her being able to stop him by the glance of her eye, by which she endeavored to bring him to the side of Lina. The young girl was openly amused. She had never before been brought into contact with artists, except in the ceremonials of official balls, where they passed, hat in hand, and were spoken of in undertones and followed by inquiring glances. Here were seen two or three of the most famous, laughing and chatting, relating their travels, and making themselves agreeable with a freedom entirely new to Lina. This mixture of undeniable fame and simplicity was to her as intoxicating as sparkling wine. Madame de Favieres had been careful at this particular dinner to invite very few women ; and those quiet and no longer young were good companions for Madame Vallencour, who was radiant with the

success of her ward. Lina's beauty had increased during the period of seclusion which had followed her great bereavement. A month spent in Switzerland, with Madame Barly and her daughters, had brought back her natural elasticity. On her return, Monsieur and Madame Vallencour, without wishing to defy custom, had received a few friends quietly. Lina was already in second mourning, and quiet dinners were not interdicted. Ten months had passed since the death of Monsieur Lemartroy. She was at that stage when, without being obliged to accept all invitations, one can accept such as offer special interest. Some of Leo's friends, chosen for their utter insignificance, came at about a quarter before ten o'clock. Madame de Favieres saw them enter, one after another, with an air of disappointment, saying to herself that she could not find among them any element of a nature that would afford a little variety to the make-up of the soirée. Her son, after a while, passed near her.

"You have not invited Bellet," said she in an undertone.

"There he is," replied Leo; "he is halting at the door before presenting himself. One would suppose him to be a soldier of the Middle Ages. You don't see him? In the curtain under the Japanese mask; he has a lugubrious expression, and wears his eyeglass in his left eye."

"Do be serious," whispered his mother, with a reproving glance. Lina turned away her head to conceal a desire to laugh, and her eye fell upon the person whom Leo had just presented with so little ceremony. The first impression was favorable to Bellet. In spite of his rather too marked disposition to take picturesque attitudes, he looked very well in his black suit, and at the farther end of the large studio the tell-tale wrinkles upon his forehead and temples were entirely out of sight. He did not appear more than twenty-eight or thirty years of age. The trained eye of Aristide took in the situation at a glance. Posing before Lina's eyes as before the lens of a camera, he assumed an air of inspiration. His blue eyes were fixed upon the curved lines of a plaster cast fastened upon the wall behind Mademoiselle Lemartroy, and he

seemed absorbed in grave meditations touching future life. He *looked* at the plaster cast, but he *saw* Lina. The presence of this new-comer, so pretty and so evidently the object of general attention, became to him a matter of the utmost importance. Who was she? What were they going to do with her? "Bah!" said he, to himself, "another one of Leo's marriage fiascos, like all the rest. If marriage is good for him, it will be good for me; it is always worth while trying; one never knows——"

At that moment Leo touched his arm.

"My frowning beauty, you are dreaming instead of coming in. Are you making verses in the doorway? Come, relieve my mother's mind; it seems she has missed you."

"Madame de Favieres is too good," said Aristide, assuming an air as near as possible to that of an irreproachable man of the world. He approached the mistress of the house in a graceful though rather affected way. Nothing that he ever did could be quite natural, although, perhaps, the discordant note might be so faint that one could scarcely be sure of its presence.

After having greeted Madame de Favieres, he slightly turned with a half-bow toward Lina, thus forcing an introduction.

"Monsieur Aristide Bellet—Mademoiselle Lemartroy," said the good lady.

Immediately Aristide slid on to a painter's stool which had strayed that way, and found himself face to face with Lina, his hat upon his knees, his legs drawn up under the seat, with the modesty of a man who knows himself to be of little consequence among so many illustrious personages, and the speechless deference of one just struck by lightning. That was his regular plan of campaign. Until now, it is true, he had never had any success, but it was the fault of the young ladies and not of his method, which must have been excellent, as Aristide had invented it.

Lina was surprised, and almost interested. In the very correct surroundings in which she had lived, no man had ever been permitted to show her his admiration in such a straightforward way. In any other house she would have been shocked, but in this *atelier*, so fancifully decorated, among these votaries of art, exempt from

any appearance of pedantry, the penetrating glance of Bellet, and his soft hands upon his knees, were scarcely even ridiculous. Addressed to some other woman, his actions would have been more so in the eyes of the girl.

Leo contemplated his manœuvres with a half-angry, half-amused expression. He did not himself wish to marry; and Lina, charming as she was, did not inspire in him the desire to repent of his resolution; but for Bellet to cast himself like that almost upon his knees at first sight before the young girl, invited only for himself, was going a little bit too fast in the chase. And then, perhaps, Leo had only a moderate esteem for his friend Bellet. He had been lazy and had received from him many favors, but he also knew that the honest Aristide had not done them for nothing. Not that he would have required extravagant returns, but many concessions had been extorted from Leo in a way which had filled him with ill-humor.

"You cannot refuse me that," his comrade would say, looking at him in a certain way which made it impossible to refuse him. But

there remained in his great kindly heart not a rancor—that word would have been too strong—but a little spot of bitterness, soon afterward vented in some inoffensive raillery. That evening he found that Bellet was going rather far. Passing behind Bellet, he tapped him on the neck.

“Very well played!”

Aristide pretended not to have heard him; drawing up his legs and holding his cap tighter under his arm, he addressed to Madame de Favieres a languishing discourse intended for his pretty neighbor, when he was interrupted by his comrade.

“Come, Aristide, spunk up; give us some poetry.” Bellet started as if he had been aroused from sleep and plunged into cold water.

“Poetry!” said he. “Oh, it is not worth while. Who is thinking of poetry here?”

“The poets, monsieur,” said Madame de Favieres, graciously; “the poets and those who love poetry. I am sure you love poetry, mademoiselle?”

"That depends, madame," replied Lina, tempering her reply by her smile.

Aristide remained in a coolly self-possessed attitude, with his eyes lost in the depths of the studio.

"Come!" said Leo, placing a hand rather rudely upon his shoulder; "are you going to be like the pretty ladies who, when they are asked to play the piano, allow themselves to be begged for two hours, and afterward cannot be got away from it?"

"To be begged! Oh, it is not worth while," said the poet, uncrossing his legs and disentangling them from among the four legs of the stool, after which feat he found himself standing without having overturned anything, and Leo took his arm.

"To the mantel-piece," said he; "let us go to the fire, *mon brave!*"

Madame de Favieres had arisen also, and made the tour of the room, commanding silence. The guests bowed their heads in resignation. Two or three of the artists present cast hostile glances at the poet, but it was only a vain

demonstration, and, seeing that they could do nothing, they resigned themselves like the others.

Aristide declaimed, in a low voice, a sonnet upon the injustice of the times. The composition was mediocre, but the two closing verses sounded well and meant something. He was applauded.

And now said Leo in his ear, in a languid tone: "But not too much. We are very dainty."

Madame Vallencour had seated herself by the young girl with a little uneasiness. She feared that these new impressions were not calculated altogether to please Lina, and she could not resist a pleased smile at the look upon her charming face. She could only see there an expression of amused curiosity. The brilliant eyes, the serious mouth, slightly parted in breathing—the whole young form was alert and wide-awake. Lina caught the look of her old friend and smiled in response.

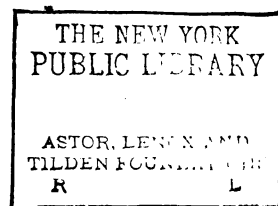
"You are not fatigued?"

"Not at all; it is interesting."

Aristide began another sonnet. It was the



ARISTIDE DECLARED IN A LOW VOICE A SONNET UPON THE INJUSTICE OF THE TIMES.
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wild plaint of one who is loved without loving—who would, but dare not, plead for a little encouragement. There were both pearls and roses, and fragrances—not “*ambiantes*”—and distresses, and an infinity of such words.

“How pretty!” murmured the ladies, when it was over.

“Very pretty, my friend—thanks—delightful!” said Leo, grasping his hand. In his ear he added: “You ought to repeat another. That one has already done much. You must agree that so lovely a person is well deserving of the honors of a new sonnet.”

Bellet smiled with a distraught air, and approaching the ladies, without affectation accepted their compliments. In this hospitable house he had succeeded in interesting two or three excellent women in his destiny—excellent, but not very penetrating—who thought him most agreeable and who wished him much success, on condition that they should not have much to do with him. These good souls heaped flowers upon him, and he very indulgently let them do so.

Mademoiselle Lemartroy did not appear very much captivated. Her straightforward and sincere nature had found nothing in the second sonnet which could please her. When, after having craftily made the round of the circle, Aristide came back to her, he stood a little apart from her, so that he could see her profile, while, although she was well aware of it, she ignored his vicinity.

Favieres, who felt a chill settle upon this closing of the evening, then opened the piano.

Bellet felt that the grass was being cut from under his feet ; if he could not find means to speak to Lina at once, all hope of forming relations with the beauty might be lost. He turned toward her, bending slightly, with a sort of chivalrous air of protection :

"Mademoiselle," said he, "you will think me very bold. Might I be permitted to ask you a question ?"

Lina bowed her head in response.

"Of the two sonnets which I have had the honor to recite before you, which do you think the least unworthy of being heard ?"

"The first, sir, assuredly," replied the young girl, in all frankness.

"That is the one which I prefer also," replied Bellet, with a half-bow.

"Humbug!" murmured Leo, punching sharply his friend's ribs with his forefinger, which straightened him up with a jerk.

Madame Vallencour had not heard Leo, but she examined Aristide a moment with a penetration which he was far from suspecting, and suddenly conceived an antipathy amounting almost to aversion for that oily and polished young man, who resembled a cake of toilet soap. As she was a woman honest and frank, and whose independent position on the one hand and absolute freedom from ambition on the other had given her freedom of speech on every occasion of her life, she absolutely knew nothing of the art of concealing her thoughts.

She was about to make, in a low voice, some reflections not pleasing to the fine poet, when a chord struck upon the piano interrupted her. A sweet but rather weak tenor voice began one of the prettiest songs of Nadaud, "Entre Lyon

et Condrieu." The simplicity of the words, the lively rhythm of the music, almost like a tender pleading, at once touched Lina's heart. Straightening up a little upon her chair, she listened with rapture and with a smile upon her lips to this idyll of the people. The singer was a great artist, a painter of renown, who made no pretension to vocal art, and who probably sang nothing but popular melodies. One after another, he was made to give them the most beautiful pearls of his repertory, to which he consented with the most amiable grace, happy in being able to do so.

When no one dared to ask for more, Favieres thanked him, and the audience from every corner of the *atelier* joined in a clamor of applause.

"Very well, my dear sir, reward me," said he to his host, who had grasped his hand. "Let me sit a moment by the side of that exquisite girl that I see over there. We have talked too long of the East ; I would have been better employed in looking at her ; it would have been a better use of time."

Favieres led him to Lina, and at once without

preliminaries they were conversing like old friends. The evident admiration of the Orientalist was a delicate homage that any woman would have been delighted with, and Madame Vallencour was charmed with it.

"How modest and amiable he is," said she to Madame de Favieres, "with all his celebrity and merit."

"We are all that way in our world," said Leo, behind her. He received from his mamma a nudge with her elbow, quite unlooked for but none the less merited ; for she saw with despair her son casting overboard one by one every chance of gaining favor. Madame Vallencour laughed. "You are already celebrated," said she, turning to the young man.

"Yes, madame, by the talent of my illustrious father and the virtues of my mother."

"What indifference, *mon Dieu!*" thought Madame de Favieres. "The unfortunate ! I shall never be able to marry him ! He seems to do it on purpose !"

"And my friend Bellet," replied the heartless jester, pointing to Aristide, who was resting

upon his right leg, his hat hanging upon his left knee, "he is likewise celebrated. There are plenty of places where, when he enters, necks are stretched, and the word goes round, 'That is he.' Besides, you can see it in his face, can you not?" Madame Vallencour turned straight round and looked full into the depths of the young man's eyes. In a second they understood each other and became allies, without knowing exactly upon what terms the alliance was formed. Profiting by the commotion caused by the appearance of tea, Leo lounged heavily against the chair of Madame Vallencour.

"Madame," said he in a low voice, "you do not know me at all, and I have hardly the right to raise my hat to you when I have the good fortune to meet you, but I feel that I can talk to you as to a mother."

This comic assurance, this becoming humbug, if those two words can ever be coupled together, gave extraordinary zest to his apparently incoherent discourse.

"I am an excellent boy," he resumed, after assuring himself by a look that Madame Vallen-

cour was listening with attention ; "you cannot imagine what a good boy I am ! And then my father will paint a delightful picture of your ward. You will see ; in twenty years one will think it was done last evening, and it will be always like that. But do you really believe that I would be a desirable match ?"

Stupefied, Madame Vallencour looked at him without a smile ; at which he winked almost imperceptibly, which quite upset her.

"Madame," he continued, "ordinarily it is to the young ladies themselves that I say such things, but under present circumstances Mademoiselle Lemartroy would probably not accord me sufficient attention ; so you see I come frankly to you. My admirable parents wish me to marry, and I, madame, am not ready for marriage. Upon my word of honor, I am not ready ; that is plainly to be seen !"

Madame Vallencour's eyes began to wink, which was a good sign. "Cannot you plainly see it ?" he continued, with adorable confidence, almost enveloping himself in the skirts of the excellent woman. "But if I were to tell them

so, it would make them sick ; they might die of grief. We don't want that, my dear madame ; say that *you* do not want it." Madame Valencour indicated by a sign that she had not the least wish to cause the death of Monsieur and Madame de Favieres.

"Then, they must be allowed to believe—in fact, that I am ready—almost ready, and permit me to make court to Mademoiselle Lemartroy."

"That is a serious matter," replied the guardian, smiling. "And suppose you should please her?"

"Impossible, dear madame, I know myself ! My nose is too short. If Cleopatra's nose had been longer, you know, there are quantities of things that would not have happened ; I have learned that from history, or in literature—well, when I was miserable at Turgot. Well, it is just like me ; absolutely : if my nose had been longer I should probably be married. But I have a nose like Coquelin—I cannot be pleasing to your lady ward. Do not insist upon it, I pray you ; you will give me pain."

Leo's eyes shone like those of a young wolf ; he

showed his white teeth. Involuntarily Madame Vallencour looked at the nose of which he had spoken ; it was rather long, but without prominence. She laughed aloud.

"Is it a bargain?" said he, offering his hand. "Confirm it." She gave him her hand, amused by such brilliant levity.

"Then it is understood ; I am going to pay my addresses. If you know it, there could be nothing more agreeable. And I will be 'best man' ; that enters into the conditions of the bargain. But say nothing of it to mamma."

"And if she asks my opinion of you?"

"Tell her that I am charming ; that will please her, and then, that will not be a lie, will it?"

"What a queer mess of nonsense!" said Madame Vallencour, beginning to laugh again.

"The fact is, that for a *soirée* of preliminaries it is rather a droll talk, but—ah!" he continued, "I forgot to tell you that, in addition to my personal charms, I am a very good dog—You don't understand? A watch-dog. While I am about it I take a position, and afterward I watch."

"Ah, that is right," said the guardian, seriously.

"And if I should see a thief approach, I should tell you. There are some curious people in our select society, if you but know it. But it is so in all society. That is of no account ; it is the first time in my life that I have worked in concert with the mamma (you are the same as a mother), instead of the young lady. Ah, madame, what an amiable person you are, and how much amusement we shall have !"

"Amusement ?"

"Yes, during the sittings for the portrait, don't you suppose I shall be there half the time ? And that would be very tiresome to you if we had not bargained together ; but now we will have nothing but amusement out of it." Upon this concluding word they separated.

Returning in their carriage, Madame Vallen-cour asked Lina : "How do you like the house, my dear child ?"

She replied, without hesitation : "Altogether lovely."

Aristide returned to his home in a singular state of mental exhilaration. He would fain be-

lieve that he had made a profound impression upon the hearts of the ladies, and in recalling to mind how he had talked, how he had acted, he believed himself this time quite irresistible.

Certain characters—and they are numerous—feel an absolute necessity for a confidant in their successes, however closely they may guard the secret of their failures ; so legitimate and sweet it seems to them to recount their good chances, easily transformed into good fortune. Aristide was such a one, and if he had had nobody to speak to, he would have passed a bad night. By a providential chance, Madame Bellet was not asleep. Hearing the door shut without much precaution, for Aristide cared but little for the repose of other people, she called her son, who presented himself at her bedside, candlestick in hand.

“A pleasant evening?” asked his excellent mother.

“A select company, few people—I recited some poetry.”

“Ah !” said Madame Bellet, retying the strings of her night-cap. “Did they applaud ?”

"Naturally! There was a charming family of new-comers. I did not rightly understand whether she was a niece—the name was not the same."

"Who?" asked the mother, with wide-open eyes.

"The young lady; a beautiful girl, very amiable."

Madame Bellet smiled fatuously, looking at her only son.

"Another marriage for Leo, I believe," continued Aristide. "He'll miss it this time, as he has with all the rest."

"Is she rich, this young lady?"

"I will find out; the first time, you understand, it is not possible. But if she had not been rich, she would not have been invited, and Favieres is going to paint her portrait."

"Ah! altogether fine folks, then," said Madame Bellet, arching her brows in profound admiration. "Monsieur de Favieres doesn't work for nothing."

"Yes, it is easy to see they are very rich; they have their carriage," said Aristide, nonchalantly. "Good night, mamma."

He retired and passed into the privacy of his chamber, where he leisurely undressed.

"Some verses, another sonnet," thought he ; "Leo spoke of them very pleasantly. I would like to see him."

In the silence and obscurity—that is to say, after his candle was out—he tried to compose some rhymes ; he tried to make *black hair* rhyme with *despair*, and gave it up, the rhyme being too poor. He then tried *pearly blond*, but the rhymes had been entirely used up already.

"To the devil !" he cried, giving a kick to his eider-down quilt, "I will go and consult Bazoché. But who knows what such a singular girl will like ? She seems to have preferred the songs of Nadaud to the *Fragrances*. That is not a proof of good taste, but one does not marry a woman because of her taste, but because of her money." Upon that profound philosophical reflection Aristide sought sleep, and found it.

Bazoché's name was Gustave Merlin : "Merlin the Enchanter," his friends called him, because he was amiable and a poet. That surname appearing not to be enough, he had been

baptized "Bazoche," with a *z*, because that orthography was more elegant, but chiefly because he had formerly come to Paris to take his degree.

Endowed with a fine figure and a keen taste for literature and art, Bazoche soon looked upon his profession with abhorrence. He belonged to the large family of those who are born to do nothing, and find their vocation thwarted by adverse fortune. An uncle, who undertook to watch over him when he had become an orphan, had placed him in the lyceum of his native town. The young man had received his baccalaureate degree at eighteen with *clat*. Then the uncle sent him to Paris, so as not to be further bothered with him. As he had a daughter, he probably judged it prudent to cut short all thought of a marriage between a lady so well endowed and the Enchanter, who had only his mother's portion (that is to say, an income of about six hundred francs). The young lady married a notary, and Bazoche remained in Paris.

He made poems, which he recited to his com-

rades ; he had published two or three articles in an ephemeral review ; he gave here and there a lesson, which kept him from starving. Having an income besides, he enjoyed a certain standing, and occasionally a needy friend asked of him the loan of a louis. To such demands he had always responded by offering a hundred sous. Then his generosities had diminished little by little. Now, in his turn, he was glad to borrow ; he had consumed grain by grain his entire capital. In proportion as his money decreased, his years increased. Bazoche was now thirty-two, and less than ever could he foresee any sure means of subsistence ahead. His love of independence, and an incurable laziness as well, made him entirely unfit for any regular employment. He had, without ever being able to obtain a regular situation anywhere, corrected proofs of classical works, arranged catalogues—in fact, any stray work that he could pick up which could bring a bit of bread to an intelligent and educated man. Bazoche was a Bohemian, but an honest one, which made his life more difficult than that of many others.

On the next morning at eight o'clock, Aristide, before going to his desk, went out into the streets which climb toward Montmartre. After having threaded the narrow lanes of the Rue Chappe, he entered a dilapidated though neat tenement, which seemed to have known better days. "Could any one live in such a roost!" thought Bellet, as he mounted to the fourth landing of the well-lighted stairs, which looked on the street. All out of breath with the effort of mounting, he knocked at a narrow door upon which a visiting card was tacked, giving the name of "Gustave Merlin," and underneath, written in pencil, "Bazoché."

"Come in," said a musical voice. He entered and closed the door after him, for he did not like draughts. Seated at a table, covered with papers, a young man with light hair and delicate appearance was rapidly writing; papers were lying everywhere on the floor around him; sheets covered with neat writing were slowly drying while he wrote others. Looking up at Aristide, he gave a little nod, and continued his work. He indited a few more lines with a pale

delicate hand, which ran over the paper like a little mouse ; then it stopped and laid down the pen.

"*Bonjour*, Bellet," said he. "What can I do for you ?"

"I have come to see you," said the visitor ; "it is so long since we have met."

"What time is it ?" asked the Enchanter. "Not nine o'clock. You have arisen so early to see a comrade ? You want something of me, then ?"

Aristide was not prompt to reply. That was not one of his perfections, and many a time he had deplored it. To give himself time to find an answer, he looked out of the only window of the little chamber.

"Tomtit," said he, almost involuntarily, "you have a fine look-out !"

The view was really beautiful. Paris was spread out under the window like an immense map seen from bird's-eye view, the grand monuments, the Opera, the tower of Saint Jacques, the Pantheon, emerging in enormous masses from a sea of gray houses. The matu-

tinal vapors, lighted up by a beautiful winter's sun, rolled round the churches like incense from their censers ; the roofs, reflecting the gleams of sunbeams from the window-panes, glanced here and there like gay echoes of a trumpet.

"I have a view, but nothing more," replied Bazoche. "No fire to-day."

"It is not very cold," said Bellet, consolingly, thrusting his hands into his pockets. He looked around for a seat, but the only chair was occupied by the Enchanter, who evinced no desire to deprive himself of it for him ; seeing which, Aristide turned to the low couch carefully made up, composed of a cot-bed, a mattress, and a thin coverlet which concealed the blankets.

"Don't walk on my papers," said Bazoche, following him with his eyes.

"What are you writing—a great work ?"

"A romance ; four hundred pages in small-hand. Marry ! it will take a long time for them to read it."

"For whom ?"

"The lucky readers of the journal that is going to publish it, as a serial."

"What journal?" The Enchanter made a gesture of perfect indifference. "That is no business of mine," he replied, coolly.

"Then things are going on well, are they?" asked Bellet, somewhat disappointed.

Bazoche leaned his elbow upon the table and fixed upon him the gaze of two very blue and very honest eyes. "Does that worry you much?" said he.

"No, it does not worry me in the least. You know that I always rejoice at anything that gives you pleasure."

"Buffoon!" said Bazoche, with more bitterness than Leo had given to the same word. "You want to use me, do you? Be quick, then. I cannot lose my time; my time is money for once perhaps, without binding me to anything. What do you need?"

"Well," said Aristide, with some hesitation, "I want to take up poetry again——"

Bazoche burst out laughing; the few papers around him flew away and fell upon the floor, while a hoarse cough succeeded the laugh. Aristide remained perfectly calm.

"Ah, you want to begin poetry again," repeated Bazoche, when he had wiped his eyes. "What a droll idea! Have you received an inheritance?"

Without stopping to reply to this disagreeable pleasantry, Bellet replied :

"Why should I not begin to write verses again? I have succeeded the first time, and I have in my pocket some things which I have come to show you, because your advice——"

Bazoche extended his hand with the gesture of Mucius Scévole.

"Listen, Bellet," said he ; "I would fain make terms with you, but, I pray, no fine formality or excuse, no hypocrisy ; I call a cat a cat. You want some verses? I have my drawer full of them ; only—only I warn you that just now they are very dear."

"Why?" said Aristide, ingenuously. Candor seemed to have taken refuge in his soul.

"Because I am making prose, prose paid for ; my romance is paid for."

"By a journal?"

"I have never been able to have a prepaid line printed in my own name, you know very well.

I have sold this to a syndicate who will sell it again to—but I will not tell you the name. And there are people who do such things in prison. Has this place the air of a prison? I ask you now! Look! don't look so amazed. It is not the first time this has happened to me, you also well know. What is it you want? Love ditties, eh?"

"Not precisely," said Aristide, with reassurance. "What I have commenced——"

"Leave me alone with your commencements, and come to the matter in hand."

"It is only in the vein of admiration, *mon cher*, nothing more."

"I see that. A marriage; tell me, confess! There will always be time to deny it afterward."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Aristide, with an offended air, "but your pleasantries are in bad taste."

"*Dame!* one only does what one can. I am made that way. We were speaking of admiration—respectful?"

"Very respectful."

"Blonde?"

"Brunette, with black eyes, complexion fine, and of the best blood."

"That will come very high," said Bazoche loyally, opening his drawer. "Pardon me, is it to be printed?"

"Later; yes, probably, and even certainly."

"After payment of the dower. That is paid in advance. It is not for my fees, what I am saying, but for my self-esteem. When a thing is to be printed I work with more care, you understand."

"What does that concern you, since it is not you who sign them?" said Aristide, a little nervously.

"It concerns me enormously. Do I not see them printed upon handsome paper, with a beautiful yellow cover. 'Fragrances Ambiantes,' that does not look so bad."

"Oh, Bazoche! that is not right. There are some of my verses in 'Fragrances'—some of my own."

"Are you quite sure of that? In that case they are not the best," retorted Bazoche quickly,

taking a manuscript from his drawer. "Look, will that do?"

The moment he handed it to Aristide he withdrew it. "Pardon, are you going to pay?"

"How much?" said Aristide.

"The usual price—a hundred sous."

"A hundred sous for a sonnet? You don't give away your wares!"

Bazoché replaced the sonnet in the drawer. "You are not obliged to buy it. One is never forced to buy verses."

"See here," said Aristide, softening; "don't be ugly. You have as much need to sell as I have to buy; perhaps more, for I can go elsewhere and find them."

"Not so good as mine," retorted the Enchanter, proudly. "And the discretion—where will you find that equal to mine? And the tacit modesty? Come, hand over your hundred sous."

"And if the sonnet does not suit me?"

"I will make you another for it. You know very well I have never cheated you!"

"Let me read it first," Bellet insisted, holding out his hand. Bazoché closed the drawer.

"You mistrust me," said Aristide, in a tone of outraged innocence.

"Entirely ; you have a devil of a memory, which has played me tricks in the times when I did not mistrust you. There are in your volume—I might say in *our* volume—some verses which have your name to them, and which you have not paid for, my loyal compeer."

Bellet slightly shrugged his shoulders, took from his wallet a new piece, and laid it upon the edge of the table. Bazoche took it, sounded it, put it in his pocket, and presented the sonnet to his Mécène, who read it without frowning.

"Well," said the Enchanter, smacking his lips like a gourmet who tastes something good.

"It isn't bad," carelessly replied the purchaser, folding the paper to fit his portfolio. "That will do the business." With elbow on the table, chin resting in the palm of his hand, Bazoche regarded him with a jesting air, with a slight shade of contempt.

"*Au revoir*," said Aristide, taking his hat.

"Not adieu," responded the young poet.

"Apropos, you know I have also novels ; there

is a demand for all in my little trades—the pretty sentimental novel—come one of these days and I will read you one gratis ; you` shall see. You are laying siege to a new conquest ? Have you any chance ? You go from the blonde to the brunette—I suppose it is with a good motive. Otherwise, my well-known principles would be opposed to it. Go, butterfly !”

Aristide cast at him a glance which displayed not an atom of good will, and went out, not only relieved of a five-franc piece, but soured by Bazoche’s allusion to previous enterprises which were without results. When should he see again the lovely unknown for whom he had just literally expended himself ? Leo would, without doubt, inform him of all that he wished to know, but he must of necessity wait some days. He attended to his office duties with bad grace, clipping as much as possible from the time he owed to his office-work ; grumbled at his mother’s dinner, and all the evening, at the wine-shop of his choice, he was pessimistic and paradoxical.



CHAPTER VII.

THE portrait of Lina had been in hand a fortnight, and Monsieur de Favieres had found it impossible to bring it to that state so ill-defined when the artist can feel sure of himself. The old experience of the painter was at fault ; there was something wanting in the expression of the young girl ; something which he had observed when she had dined at his house, but which had not come again ; a particular expression of interest in life without which Lina was no longer Lina, but some other beauty. Truly, Leo had expended all his drollery, and there was nothing wanting in that respect. He provoked in Madame Vallencour many a laugh for which she was quite disposed to reproach herself, seeing that her ward took no part in them ; but he could never succeed in bringing a smile to the serious face of his father's model.

"I cannot understand it," said Favieres one

day when at dinner with his wife and his son ;
“Mademoiselle Lemartroy, when she sits, seems to be bored.”

“Bored when I am there ! Papa, that is impossible,” replied Leo, with imperturbable gravity. “I will appeal to you, mamma, whether it is possible to be bored when I spin yarns.”

“The fact is”—naively began Madame de Favieres. Her husband interrupted her.

“Possible or not,” said he, with some irritation, “the fact remains, she has no expression on her face while she is sitting for me.”

“She is deep,” murmured Leo. A look from his mother silenced him.

“We must find some amusement for her,” continued the painter. “I am no believer of the system which consists of filling the studio with noise and bustle when one is working, but in the present case anything would be better than the nothingness that we have.”

“Some little soirées,” suggested Leo, “in the afternoon, in the English style. Mamma, look up your sandwiches.”

“Not that,” replied the father. “One or

two intelligent people by turns, who would talk, not to her, but before her, in a way to interest her——”

“We understand,” said the incorrigible. “One of the two intelligent people will be I, to give the responses for the other. Name some one, father ; name him.”

“The other ? I really don’t know—a musician——”

“*Entre Lyon et Cordrieu*,” sang Leo. “Yes, that is just what we will do. Was she not pretty when the great Orientalist sang the songs of Nadaud—the delightful Mademoiselle Lemartroy ? But we will have to forego that ; he pursues his Oriental studies in the afternoon, and will not sing in town, even if well paid.”

“Well, then, a talker—an author—some one who will read something.”

“Aristide Bellet,” put in Madame de Favieres, with sudden inspiration.

“There !” said Leo, in a tone of compunction, “I was sure that it would be he. Mamma, you have a soft side for Aristide, amounting to partiality.”

"I like him much. I do not conceal it," replied his mother, unmoved. "He is amiable, well brought up—in fact, he was the friend of your childhood."

"My childhood! Put it of my youth. That would be more exact. Instead of friend, say comrade. Always be exact."

"Well, it is yourself who brought him here. We like him. Have you any reason for liking him no longer?"

"I have no reason for liking him less, my adored mother," replied, Jesuit-like, the good apostle. "Then you want Bellet, do you? Bellet could charm the delightful indifferent one, by himself."

"Leo!" said Madame de Favieres, severely; "if, instead of railing always this way, of joking in an almost disagreeable manner, and of—of——"

"Game-making!" breathed the spoiled child.

"Game-making," repeated Madame de Favieres, energetically; "yes, ridiculing all that is respectable, you—you consented to be amiable and—and well behaved——"

"As I know how to be," he murmured.

"Yes, as you can be when you will—there is no need of anybody to amuse——"

"Louis XIV., called the Unamusable," concluded Leo, kissing his mother, who arose after having folded her napkin.

"Yes, mamma, you are right. But what can I do? When I meet Madame Vallencour I feel myself sparkling with wit; my sallies come out from under my finger-nails; the shafts of brilliancy shoot—the words of wisdom cannot wait, but come tumbling out together, *mal à propos*, like the serpents in fireworks that miss fire. I have too much vivacity, mamma. It is a misfortune—I am not responsible. It is the fatal inheritance received from those who gave me life."

Monsieur de Favieres laughed in spite of himself. His wife was already laughing, while turning away her head in apparent displeasure.

"If you say—oh, my dear and venerated parents!—to that excellent Madame Vallencour, for whom I burn 'with more fire than I have lighted'—if you ask her to bring some one

of her acquaintances, of her neighborhood, a marmoset, or a black poodle, or a friend of the family, or a female friend, pretty, young, rich ; and an orphan, above all, mamma—I would never have the heart to give you a mother-in-law—a mother-in-law of my own, I mean to say.”

Madame de Favieres cast a glance of wounded feeling upon her son.

“Mademoiselle Lemartroy is pretty, young, rich, and an orphan,” said she, in a tone of reproach.

“But, mamma, I have not given her up ; only I have begun with Madame Vallencour, because the important part of a siege is to make sure of the outposts.”

“Leo is no doubt right,” said Monsieur de Favieres, who was walking and smoking in the studio. “If Mademoiselle Lemartroy were to bring a friend——”

“One could then, without impropriety, invite Bellet,” said his son, airily. “Oh, what a pretty *partie carrée*.”

“No, Bellet would be of no use then,” said the mother.

"We will try, mamma, we will try all the combinations. And I offer myself—see if I am not made of good intentions—I offer myself to go and see Madame Vallencour, to make proposals to her ; I will see at the same time whether it is easier to please father's charming model at her home or in the studio. She is truly divine, that young person. Young, pretty, rich, orphan, my whole programme ; the only misfortune is, I fear I cannot please her."

Leo actually did call upon Madame Vallencour. The result of their conference made its appearance at the studio the following Monday, in the shape of the amiable Cecile Barly, in a great black hat surmounted by a pale blue bow, who beamed on all around her.

Cecile was pretty, but she had, besides her little *retroussé* nose, her great clear gray eyes, and her smiling little mouth, an air of good humor altogether catching—one felt, at seeing her, that she would still be charming at fifty ; that the years would bring her a crowd of good qualities without taking from her anything but youth and a little freshness.

When he saw her, Leo, who was approaching her, made an abrupt pause. Of all the young girls' faces which he had heretofore met, this one alone possessed for him something besides beauty. He found therein a childish frankness, and a satisfaction in life which marriageable young girls possess, no doubt, but which they conceal under a pretence of indifference.

"My friend, Mademoiselle Barly, has asked permission to visit your studio, sir," said Lina to Favieres. "Monsieur your son assured us, the other day, that you would not look upon it as a mark of idle curiosity, but of a great desire for a closer view of the beautiful works of your pencil."

The delighted painter did the honors of his home, seconded by Leo, who had all at once become serious. After a half-hour given up to preliminaries, the sitting for the portrait began. Madame Vallencour conversed in low tones with Madame de Favieres; Lina, immovable, fell into position with fixed immobility. Cecile, who had been sitting a moment on a cushion in front of her friend, suddenly said to the painter:

"Will it annoy you much if I look quietly at

the pictures on the walls? I will not make any noise or break anything."

"I pray you, do so, mademoiselle," said the old painter, gallantly; "and even if you will kindly give us your reflections, I will consider it a favor."

The pretty Cecile cast a look around the studio, which almost immediately filled her with smiling vivacity.

"Oh!" said she, in a low voice, "so many arms, so many legs, so many heads—I would never dare; there are too many people."

A general laugh went round the studio. Lina herself laughed aloud upon the posing table, but seeing the eye of the painter turned toward her, she fell again into her expression of indifference.

"No! Laugh," cried Favieres, "be gay, put on your pretty, girlish expression. Mademoiselle Cecile, talk, I pray you."

"Impossible, monsieur," promptly replied the mouth which smiled under the little turned-up nose. "I can't say a word when I am asked to; there are six of us in our family, who are all that way."

"Behold the fruits of an excellent education," murmured Leo under his breath, but she heard him.

"Yes, monsieur," she replied, turning toward him. "It is the despair of my father."

"To have his children all mutes?" timidly asked Leo, holding his head on one side like a pensive bird.

"It might well be for that, but chiefly in having six daughters."

"If they all resemble you, mademoiselle," said Favieres, with his exquisite politeness, "Admiral Barly is a man to be envied."

"Oh, monsieur, you don't know what it is," replied Cecile, with marvellous quickness.

The ice was broken. Lina listened with evident pleasure to the repartees of her friend ; and Leo, almost intimidated, looked at her with a curiosity full of interest. When the sitting had terminated, to the satisfaction of the artist, and the girls had disappeared with Madame Vallengour, the young man addressed his mother :

"Well, mamma, she is not stuffed with straw, at least, that one !"

"What are you talking about?" asked the good lady, looking around her with alarm.

"About Mademoiselle Barly. And she has a nose, a true nose. A *retroussé* nose, you know, mamma; there are no noses but turned-up noses in the world. You have a *retroussé* nose, my adored mother, and that is why you are so charming and so good."

"I a turned-up nose? Did you ever!" said Madame de Favieres, looking at her still handsome face in a glass; a face of regular and classic beauty.

"Yes, mamma, turned up at the end. You cannot see yourself in profile; don't try it, it makes you squint. If you had not had a nose like that, father would not have married you. Would you, father?"

Favieres smiled at his son's nonsense, and added some touches to the portrait.

"I should like to be a painter myself," continued Leo, with enthusiasm, "to paint her, with her big black felt hat, her blue bow, her red cheeks, her infantile teeth. She is a hundred times more striking than Mademoiselle Lemartroy."

"Oh! how can you say so?" said Madame de Favieres, offended.

"Mademoiselle Lemartroy is superb, I admit. She is tragedy. But that adorable *frimousse*——"

"Leo, you are outrageous," said his mother, with severity.

"*Frimousse, frimousse, frimousse!*" repeated Leo, obstinately. "She is pure comedy. And she is comical! That is rare. Do you know, oh, my parents, girls who are amusing? And there are six like that! What-a dream! I would like to enter the admiral's service as a *valet de chambre*."

"Leo, don't make a fool of yourself," began Madame de Favieres. Her husband interrupted her.

"You forget your programme," said he to his son, smiling. "Pretty, admitted; rich, and an orphan. Mademoiselle Barly is without fortune, and her parents are, thank God! very healthy." Leo's gayety broke down at once.

"It is true," said he, slowly; "and then, a wife—one would have to become accustomed to

a comical wife ; it is always so out of the calculation. You are right, my excellent father ; I must come back to my programme—rich, and an orphan. But one must laugh ! ”

“ As much as you like ; my model has another face when she is amused.”

“ Oh, well, I will ; I will amuse her,” said Leo, resuming his good humor. “ We will amuse her, you shall see. And I, who proposed a marmoset ! Happily, Madame Vallencour has not taken me at my word. Mamma, we must go and see Madame Barly. Six daughters like that are a veritable blessing in a household ! ”

“ Are you not afraid,” asked Madame de Favieres of her husband on the evening of this memorable day, “ that Leo is smitten by that little Barly, and would like to marry her ? ”

Monsieur de Favieres, like a wise and well-informed man, bowed his head.

“ He will not marry the whole six Misses Barly,” replied he. “ Let him dilute his admiration ; it will be the best means of ridding him of it.”



CHAPTER VIII.

"GEORGES !" said Cecile Barly, without raising her eyes to her cousin, who was gazing distractedly out of the window.

Georges Tracy came to himself with a little start, like a man caught *flagrante delictu* in some unlawful act.

"Cousin !" he replied, approaching her.

"You are losing your time. She never comes before four o'clock, and it is now only half-past three."

This time Tracy blushed. Cecile, also, in spite of her teasing, felt her face flush.

"Whom are you talking of ?" said he, forcing a look of indifference. The girl regained her self-command, seeing him so excited, and posed before him like a judge of the court of assizes.

"It is the part of the accused to plead, and not mine. It is not I who watch at the

window for the coming of a certain coupé. It is not I who am in a sad frame of mind when a certain young lady does not call on my aunt's reception day."

A slight commotion announced in the adjoining drawing-room that a lady visitor was taking leave of Madame Barly. Cecile, leaving her cousin discomfited before the tea-table, ran before the lady to receive her parting kiss, and to conduct her to the door of the antechamber. Then she returned to her cups and teaspoons. Tracy kept silence, pulling at his whiskers by turns. Cecile looked at him out of the corner of her eye, without seeming to see him.

"Do you wish me to tell you my way of thinking, Georges?" said she, suddenly, in a low voice. "Well, my heart is with you, as the Prince of Wales said, and my heart being with you, it is my duty, as an ally, to come to your aid."

"To my aid! In what?" demanded Tracy, with an admirable pretence of stupidity. She shot at him a glance of her blue eyes, which laughed in spite of her.

"You deserve that I should mount—should mount, that is a subjunctive, do you understand?—that I should mount my high horse, and that I should refuse—should refuse, sir—to reply to your insidious question. But I feel pity for you ; you manage your affairs so badly. And I, I wish for your success. Look in that glass, then, before you, and tell me if you have the face of a young man whose cousin wishes only for his good. You do not deserve your good fortune, Georges ! Oh, as for that, you *don't*."

Though he was much annoyed, Tracy could not help laughing. Cecile kept her eyes fixed upon the dish of little cakes that she was coquettishly arranging, but she saw plainly the smile, and continued, while the conversation of three or four ladies in the drawing-room saved her all fear of being heard :

"It is not so much," she resumed, maliciously, "that I feel such an interest in you, if I must speak frankly, but it is in my charming friend. If you were not an officer of the navy, you might be good for something ; but of what use

is a naval officer? He is always away." She shrugged her shoulders with a little movement of comic disdain. Tracy listened attentively. A gentleman was passing, hat in hand. Cecile gravely acknowledged his salutation, and pretended to be counting the lumps of sugar in the sugar-bowl, when, the new-comer being seated, and the general conversation having been resumed, she continued: "A seaman is always away, and when he is on shore he doesn't see much; the habit of looking through a spy-glass," and she imitated with her two hands the gesture of a sailing-master scanning the horizon, "prevents his knowing how to bring his eyes to see near-by objects. And then he places himself at the window to discover a certain coupé, when it is quite another thing that he should do."

"And what is that something else, my knowing cousin?" demanded Tracy.

"He should go often to the house of my charming friend, have himself invited by the good guardian, who asks nothing more—for, take notice, Georges, that is all she asks—and

not leave the field clear to a villanous man whom I detest, and who, if you don't take care, will obtain that which you dare not ask for." Tracy straightened himself up, and his face took on an expression so hard that Cecile was a little alarmed. "All right as yet, Georges," said she; "don't excite yourself. He is not here."

"Of whom do you speak?" said he, curtly. The girl saw that he was serious, and in a few words, in the confusion of arrivals and departures, she recounted to him the history of the last three or four months.

The portrait of Lina had been gloriously improved by Favieres, who almost decided it to be his *chef-d'œuvre*; but Madame de Favieres, who had a weak side for Aristide Bellet, had invited him to be present at the sittings, under pretext of amusing Mademoiselle Lemartroy.

"It appears that I am not enough," said Cecile, blushing modestly, for she has had the conscience to be just a little different from herself of late. "Madame de Favieres loves poetry. She is wrapped up in that gentleman. I don't know why, I am sure, for he is the very last—but

everybody is not alike, as Lina's old cook says. Well, he came, that disagreeable creature, he recited a sonnet, and then he read a novel—not bad, the novel. The sonnet was a kind of declaration to Lina, the novel was a transparent apologue—you see that from this: the earthworm in love with a star. Lina was flattered. It seems that those things flatter her—apologues and sonnets. I cannot judge, no one has ever made any for me.”

“Cecile,” interrupted Tracy, “your friend is intelligent and proud. It isn't possible that such means have been successful with her.”

“Eh, eh ! you know nothing about it, cousin. You are like me—no one has ever tried them on you. But, evidently, that would not have sufficed ; there was something else—profound admiration, homage from below, the annihilation in which the gentleman sunk himself, that he might be lifted out. The princess who seats a poet upon her throne feels a joy unknown to simple mortals. I present this reflection to you, Georges, but not as coming from myself ; it was Monsieur Vallencour who made it, night before last. And

then, Monsieur Bellet affects modesty. He speaks of his good mother and of his difficult beginnings ; he is very eloquent upon that subject. If you know what you are about, Georges—don't pull your whiskers that way, Georges ; you will pull them out by the roots."

Cecile laughed a little quiet laugh.

Tracy's face grew dark, and took on an expression that she had never seen there before. He looked at her, saw that she was distressed, and forced a smile to reassure her.

"You know very well," she resumed, "that here everybody loves you ; papa dotes on you, and would give the whole six of us to have you for a son. You know that mamma, Monsieur Valencour, and his wife have great friendship and esteem for you."

"Oh, I know ; I thank you, Cecile, for saying so many nice things, but I am a sailor. I have been told—and it is that that keeps me silent—that Monsieur Lemartroy would not give his daughter to a sailor."

"Do you think," slowly answered Cecile, "that if she loved you——"

He placed his hand firmly upon his cousin's arm. "Don't talk so," said he, turning away his eyes. "If she—don't speak of things impossible. Don't ask me again to renounce my career."

"And yet," said the girl, impetuously, "he who desires the end desires the means."

"Oh," replied he, "it is not a feeling of professional pride. I know that I could serve my country somewhere else, besides on the deck of a vessel; but while I am a sailor I cannot present myself, and I cannot say to her that if I had the happiness to be accepted I would perhaps quit the service. Such things are done, not talked about in advance."

A sound of voices announced a fresh arrival of lady visitors.

"Well," said Cecile, rapidly, "even if you should never marry her, your duty as a gentleman would be to defend her from the machinations of a fool, who besides is perhaps a villain, and in either case very displeasing. If you do not do it, you are no longer my cousin."

"I will do it," replied Tracy, with glistening eyes.

Madame Vallencour entered with Lina. When she saw them, Cecile was afraid she had been heard ; a bright blush overspread her countenance, and she kissed her friend with confused precipitation. Tracy, taken unawares as he was, bowed without embarrassment, but with a sort of awkwardness which gave him a culpable appearance. Lina looked from one to the other, and thought she had interrupted a tête-à-tête. The thought that the young officer could be in love with Cecile was a new and rather unpleasant one ; Georges' look and his silent attentions had taught her to consider him one of her own admirers. She was far from doubting the deep and respectful regard he felt for her, but such a sudden change disconcerted her. With an unusually cool glance she passed before him, and went to speak with Madame Barly.

"We have displeased her," said Cecile. "Are you not ashamed, Georges, to behave like a simple *patache* ? If you let her think that you are paying attention to me, we will have gone too far. Go pay your addresses, be a man ; there is no longer any doubt about the matter.

And I will make them invite you to dinner. And the sonnet man will not be there, I will guarantee that. But go now."

She pushed him gently into the drawing-room, where she herself appeared a moment after—a cup of tea in one hand, a plate of cake in the other—with all the graciousness of a young housekeeper.

"Where are your sisters?" asked Lina, following to assist her.

"Out walking. They are invisible on mamma's reception days," replied Cecile, laughing. "They cannot be seen until I am married, and then only one at a time. I shall be obliged to marry, out of pure sisterly charity."

In the eyes of her friend she read clearly the question, "To your cousin?"

"I have already told you, no," replied she, in an undertone, unable to prevent a slight blush which rose to her temples. Lina said nothing; she knew that anything might be denied. A certain annoyance, for which she could not account to herself, gave her face an expression of proud dignity. She took a sugar-bowl and cream-jug,

and accompanied Cécile in her round without unbending. Tracy, who watched her from the cloak-room, took note of all that had taken place, and cast a look of consternation toward his cousin.

"Really, that would perhaps be better," said the little diplomat to herself. "If he can only be made jealous!"

According to her promise, Cecile managed somehow to make Madame Vallencour invite Tracy to dinner, which was not a very difficult task. Lina's year of mourning had expired, and the young girl was out in the world again, although she still avoided official receptions, Lina's guardians were delighted to see her under full sail, as Monsieur Vallencour said, who, since he had become guardian of a sailor's daughter, had affected sea-phrases. These estimable people, who were fond of receiving, enjoyed to the full the pleasure of making their house agreeable, and bringing out the hidden charms, the beauty, and the merits of their ward.

Tracy might rest assured that he had an unconscious ally in Madame Vallencour, attracted

instinctively toward all that was correct and in good taste ; not that she paid him marked attention, but he noticed in his welcome a something which she did not put into that of any other. But he might likewise be assured that the suitors for Mademoiselle Lemartroy's hand were more numerous than those of Penelope.

After dinner a crowd of celebrities spread themselves through the two rooms of the house, ornamenting with black coats and white shirt-fronts the chairs of ancient stuffs ; displaying, in the midst of arabesque hangings, heads blond, brown, and even partially bald, with eye-glasses and without, but all animated with the same desire to please.

Tracy was thoroughly discouraged. By nature he was one of those whose pride prevented from exposing himself to possible defeat ; a sentiment of exaggerated modesty, besides, led him to mistrust himself. He was just about to withdraw, vowing to renounce all hope, when, to his great surprise, Lina came toward him.

"During dinner you were relating something

very interesting, monsieur," said she, when the conversation suddenly took a turn.

"You were listening to me, mademoiselle?" replied he, delighted. "I should not have dared to suppose it."

"I was listening, and I quite regretted that the conclusion of your recital was lost to me. My father has often spoken to me of Madagascar, where, when young, he had spent some months, and I should have liked to know——"

He told her all she had been anxious to learn. She listened to him, surprised to find so much poetry in the elegant and unaffected phrases of this young man, who was neither author nor orator. In simple words he brought before her new and strange pictures: he gave her the impression of a distant country which she had already seen, perhaps in her dreams; she felt that all that he said was true, and at the same time clothed with a charm which a new resident could not have given it.

"How well you have observed, monsieur," she said, in surprise, "and how well you know how to tell it."

"It is perfectly true, my dear child," said Admiral Barly, who had approached, with several others, while Tracy was talking; "he has observed well, and has well told what he has seen. I avow that when any one talks of Madagascar I am all ears. I was young when I was there—when we were there with Lemartroy. We were immensely amused at an adventure out there."

"Tell it; let us hear it, admiral," was heard all around the room.

"It was a great while ago," he began, caressing his white whiskers, while a smile half humorous, half melancholy, lighted up his large serious face. "It is many, many years since we were cadets upon the *Reine Blanche*. An enormous hurricane arose at Cherbourg, where we were lying. A bailiff, universally detested for his severity, had one night lost his official seals; as the probable authors of the mischief, against whom he had ferociously plotted, he suspected two individuals of us. The things were gone, it was clear; upon thorough search in our quarters nothing could be found. The *Reine Blanche* was searched from top to keel, with no result."

We were furious, as may be supposed ; and without respect for discipline—it might have cost us our promotion—the usher was discreetly keel-hauled one fine night. The *Reine Blanche* set sail for a voyage round the world, and carried us to Madagascar ; we only touched there, and the voyage was concluded according to orders. Ten years afterward, the chances of the service brought me again to that island. As I had time, I took some strolls. One day, on my rambles, I spied something shining in the greenery over the door of a miserable looking cabin, a sort of wayside ale-house. Verdure redeems everything in that country ; the most paltry shanty becomes charming when covered with lianas. That brilliant spot attracted my attention ; with my cane I pushed aside the lianas, and what did I see ? The seals of old Lenglumé."

The listeners laughed aloud. " How did they come there ? " asked Monsieur Vallencour.

" I have no idea ; it is certain that they had been on board the *Reine Blanche*, and that they had eluded all search ; but how any one had made them disappear, and leave the ship without

anybody else seeing their removal, is hard to understand. Some one had probably thrown them overboard on some voyage, attached to a tow-line. It was not an easy thing to do, especially to recover them afterward from the water. Certainly, they were then on top of the cabin. See how long it had been—ten years at least."

"They are there yet," said Tracy, quietly ; "I saw them at my last visit. The visitors make a sort of pilgrimage to see them."

"You should tell old Lenglumé," replied his uncle. "But he must be dead long since. And our promotion made his purchase. If the culprit had been discovered, his fun would have cost him dear."

Lina listened. These stories of one whose youth had been like that of her father ; these pictures of a country where Monsieur Lemartroy had spent so much of his life, plunged her in a kind of revery, which carried her far away from the present. She aroused herself by an effort, and thanked the admiral. One part of her smile reached Tracy, who was dazzled by it.

Encouraged, he drew near ; the reserve which was part of his ordinary habit was augmented, when near the young girl, by a timidity almost painful, he was so fearful of displeasing her. Yet he felt that evening that such a favorable opportunity rarely occurred, and without affectation he took part in the conversation. His good sense, his frank manners, the dignity of his bearing, had already struck Lina more than once ; it seemed now that she realized their revelation. In the midst of men superior to the majority, Georges Tracy, far from suffering by the comparison, took his true place as opposed to the false dilettanti, false savants, and all those who pretend to be what they are not. His real merit was clearly seen in his lightest words, in the promptitude with which he seized on the wing the ideas thrown out before him, to refute or to support them. During half an hour Lina enjoyed the pleasure, infinitely rare and subtle, of hearing eminent men converse ; and among them all, one alone who, she could not doubt, now received her girlish smile as beyond the highest reward. The circle, incessantly increased by

fresh arrivals, had become too large to admit of general conversation ; Lina arose and crossed the room. In the embrasure of a door in front of her, resting upon his left leg like an antique model, Bellet, with hat in hand, fixed upon her a long, penetrating glance, as melancholy as an autumn rain. Without knowing why, and with a certain feeling of anger against herself, Mademoiselle Lemartroy blushed. She was not one of those whose blood rushes to their temples at the least movement : her ivory forehead was ignorant of the conceited archness of a false modesty ; and when she felt her cheeks flushing it gave her a feeling of annoyance, almost of anger, which made her turn away her head. " There is Monsieur Bellet," she said, inwardly, " who will think it is because of him. Is it not silly that one cannot defend one's self from that which is most disagreeable ? "

Aristide, indeed, did approach leisurely, like an elegy in a black coat. He bowed respectfully, in silence, and held out his hand, gloved in pearl gray, to Lina as if asking alms. She had the impression that it was really alms that she

was granting in placing the tips of her fingers in that hand, a little too large for a distinguished hand ; and the thought caused a second rush to her cheeks of the blush which had begun to leave them.

“ How stupid it is, *mon Dieu !* How ridiculous ! ” she said to herself ; but not being able to find a remedy for her disagreeable position, she murmured a hardly intelligible “ Good evening, sir,” and left him, very much displeased with herself. Why had she blushed ? She was used to seeing herself looked at, sometimes with curiosity, sometimes with admiration ; she could support such looks with the imperturbable indifference of a well-bred girl. In the regard of the young poet there was, then, a something different from that of others. In trying to recall what it was that disconcerted her, Lina felt the blood rise to her cheeks for the third time. It was quite too much emotion for so slight a cause—to tell the truth, for nothing ; she resolved to think no more of it, and kept her resolve. Bellet would not have missed the minutes just passed for ten louis. He knew the power of his

eyes over women, and flattered himself that he knew how to make the best of it. Unable to perceive that the women heretofore fascinated by him were of another sort from Mademoiselle Lemartroy, he thought he had impressed her deeply, and said to himself with pride that he had managed the affair finely. With the air of a conqueror, he made several turns of the room, presented his respects to Madame Vallencour, who received them coolly, and returned home, in the state of mind of a candidate for a seat in the Chamber of Deputies who has been well received by his constituents.





CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE the showers of May had strewn the soil of the Champs Élysées with the white petals of the horse-chestnuts, forty different aspirants to the hand of Mademoiselle Lemartroy had insinuated or declared their intentions. Madame Vallencour found herself overwhelmed. She had said to herself that to marry an orphan heir-ess was not quite such an easy matter as to make up a whist party; but, without counting very exactly the trouble that awaited her, she had thought that five or six contestants—we will say, to be liberal, a dozen—would not be, after all, very difficult to manage. The battalion of aspirants who besieged the excellent guardian deranged her plans, upset her combinations, and destroyed the peace of her life.

“What would you have?” said Monsieur Vallencour, thrusting his hands into his pockets

with a resigned air. "Nobody can prevent the young men from wishing to marry that lovely child."

"Do you think," she replied, "the young men would be quite so eager if the lovely child were penniless?"

Monsieur Vallencour, who was a professed optimist, smiled without replying, and he kept himself out of the business for the moment ; but not for long, for the polite attentions showered upon him by affectionate uncles, by zealous cousins, left him scarcely time to breathe.

"Did you ever imagine," queried his wife, one evening, as he entered the drawing-room, ready to go out, "that one could dine so much in town? This is the eighth invitation we have had this week."

"The week has only seven days," mildly observed the worthy man, "and we gave a dinner the day before yesterday."

"But we accepted two invitations to breakfast. At last, that is over. We shall have a little rest next month."

"In Switzerland? But, my dear, we will enjoy

in the original the 'Voyage de Monsieur Perichon.' There are at least a dozen candidates for matrimony who have been informed where we are going." Monsieur Vallencour mused a moment. "Suppose we were to send them to the Balearic Isles," he suggested.

"The Balearics! For what?"

"Because we are not going there. Fancy what a life they would lead there! What a pretty second act of the comedy!"

"The poor fellows!" laughed Madame Vallencour; "they have not deserved that. In truth, it is not their fault if Lina pleases them."

The young girl entered, with an excuse for being late. Her guardian repeated to her the suggestion that he had just made, and she laughed with him.

"My dear guardian," she said, as they descended the steps, "I see plainly that I give you a world of trouble; but you must pardon me. I cannot resolve to marry any one, without reflection."

"Take your time, my pet," replied Monsieur Vallencour; "we would have cause for

great reproach if, in our hurry, you should make an imprudent choice." And the guardian couple accompanied the heiress to the eighth repast of the week.

It was at the house of Monsieur Barly, whose large dining-room presented to the eye the agreeable spectacle of twenty-four covers, occupied by a jolly company, among whom were three of the six daughters of the admiral. Cecile took upon her, without saying much of anything, the amusing of one whole side of the table. Tracy's laughter alone was forced. He had to leave the following week, and never—it seemed to him—had an order of departure come at so inopportune a time.

"Bah!" said his pretty cousin, who detected his sad thought in his face; "it is only a little run upon the Mediterranean. You will be back in three months."

"I agree with you, cousin," he replied, gravely.

Lina's eyes rested upon the handsome, serious face of the young officer with particular attention. Many times had she essayed to catch a look, an expression of countenance, that she

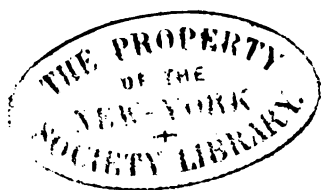
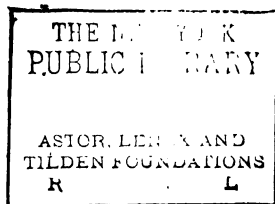
might interpret as a proposal. She had never seen anything but admiration—that admiration which, flattering at first, she now felt only as an ordinary expression which she had seen upon too many vulgar or insignificant faces. Yet Tracy loved her, she was almost sure. Why did he so obstinately try to conceal it from her, while the others displayed, with pride, sentiments the sincerity of which had not been demonstrated? Only Bellet—at that recollection, the blush came again to Lina's cheeks. She looked around the table, and calmness again possessed her. She did not see Aristide this evening—she was sure of that. Involuntarily—while replying to the remarks of her neighbor—she occupied herself with establishing a sort of parallel between the two young men. Tracy was very superior in point of bearing and education—of that there was no doubt. But Aristide had something about him particularly seductive; his poem, his short story which he had read one day during a sitting at Monsieur de Favieres's, had a tone of subdued passion which suggested all that they did not ex-

press—especially the novel. It was the short and sad story of a man—a poet, too—dying under the eyes of a woman without telling her of his love, because she was the daughter of a prince and he only a common mortal. The allusion was transparent, the story a little too romantic not to be easily ridiculed; but the style was flowery: a sad sigh of affection permeated the well-modelled phrases, and Lina remembered oftener than she would have wished certain little words, like cries of pain. To be loved that way, that was worth living for. It was not formal admiration, like wedding presents made to order, for a stipulated price, by a professional furnisher; it was the precious work of art; it was the ring of ancient ballads sent by a valiant messenger at the risk of his life. But yet, the noble and regular features, the honest eyes, the straightforward look, of Tracy, irresistibly attracted the attention of the heiress. Why did he not reveal his love to her—if he did love her? She might then compare the two affections which had been proffered her, and choose between them understandingly. A sentiment



"COFFEE?" SHE ASKED HIM, WITH A FRANK SMILE, AS WAS HER UNFAILING HABIT.

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of prudence made her hesitate. She was still so young—did she know what she wanted? Ought she to engage herself hastily to one of these two men—for all the rest 'did not count—while yet another might turn up, whom she did not yet know, and who might be the master of her destiny?

The guests arose from the table to retire to the drawing-room; the young ladies, like a flock of white swallows, dispersed into every corner.

Following Cecile to dispense the coffee, Lina found herself facing Tracy with the cup which she held in her hand.

"Coffee?" she asked him, with a frank smile, as was her unfailing habit.

"No, thanks," he replied, bowing; "I never drink it."

She looked around her; everybody was served. She deposited the cup upon a table near by, and stood before the young man.

"You are going to leave, monsieur?" she asked.

"Alas! yes, mademoiselle."

"That is a pity. We had projected, Cecile and I, some grand amusements for the coming summer, but the presence of a cousin would be necessary, and we shall miss you."

"A cousin would be necessary—absolutely?" asked Tracy, who could not resist a laugh.

"Certainly, as escort." Lina perceived that that word might seem unfeeling, and it was not with any such intention that she had uttered it.

He bowed gravely, while she looked at him with an abashed gentleness. "I thank you for according to me so much confidence," said he.

"We shall miss you, I assure you," she replied, in a more subdued tone. "My guardian has rented a chalet at Dinard, close by that of Madame Barly; your cousins will be very sorry. We will remain there until the end of September."

"Lina," said the youngest Miss Barly, "mamma wants to say something to you." Cecile came up, but too late. Casting a furious glance at her maladroit sister, who had just spoiled the tête-à-tête, she remained with the young man.

"What was she saying to you?" asked the subtle confidante.

"It seems to me—I think she wishes to see me this summer at Dinard."

"Then you must come," decided Cecile.

"But the service!"

"When one has an uncle who is an admiral," said she, sententiously, "one may at least render his service near to his family. That must be arranged, cousin, or I renounce you. It is a very serious matter for you, do you know it?" Tracy was not at all convinced of it. Meanwhile, she continued: "You must go, but not for long; she must regret your absence for a while."

"Do you advise me to resign my position to others?" asked Georges, hesitating.

"Exactly," said the pretty Cecile, throwing up her small chin several times in succession; "the others weary her, except one, and he will not be there. She must regret your absence." That was such wise counsel that, if they had been alone, Tracy would have embraced the counsellor with enthusiasm. Under the circum-

stances, such an exhibition would have been unseasonable, and he satisfied himself with giving her a look of extreme affection. He took his leave with a more joyous heart than he had known for a long time.





CHAPTER X.

MONSIEUR and Madame Vallencour had conscientiously conducted their ward clear to the lakes of Switzerland, without meeting a single suitor, much to their joy. This little rest gave them renewed vigor, and they felt themselves ready to face the siege which would surely be resumed at that elegant resort.

They were nicely installed in a *châlet* near that of Madame Barly, at the extremity of the beach near by Saint Énogat, and Lina felt her spirits revived as they had been during the life of her father. In the society of Cecile and her sisters she regained the youthful carelessness of which her grief at first, and afterward the anticipation of her marriage, had despoiled her. That marriage, in fact, which had preoccupied her the whole winter, no longer appeared to her so necessary or so inevitably near at hand. The life

that Lina led with her guardians was no other, nor could it be other, than a transition between the happy days passed with her father, and the future, when she would be married and settled in a definite existence. At first, the young girl had suffered a sort of painful constraint ; she felt herself, so to say, a hinderance to the tranquillity of those to whom her father had confided her, and her extreme politeness, if such a term may be used in such connection, made her hope to put a speedy end to a situation of so much embarrassment. But the kindly graciousness and good humor of Madame Vallencour had modified, little by little, her feelings. Lina had comprehended that it would be a very poor acknowledgment of the devotion and affection of these excellent people, to plunge into a hasty marriage, as one runs into port to escape a high sea. She became conscious that, after all, the moral and material solicitude which her friends evinced on her account was no draft upon their goodness of heart ; she had, on the contrary, filled the place in a measure of the much-desired child with which they had never been blessed.

Poor, Lina would have been indeed their daughter ; heiress to a hundred thousand livres of income, she was their cherished ward, and the gratitude which they had vowed to the memory of Commandant Lemartroy, for the great proof of the confidence he had reposed in them at his last hour, made the task easy.

Besides, they had brought with them their cook, which relieved Monsieur Vallencour of most of the asperities of the journey. Marianne was with them as general servant, but more specially attached to the service of Mademoiselle Lemartroy. Relieved of these troublesome preoccupations, Lina now only thought of enjoying life in company with the "little Barlys," and especially of Cecile, who became more and more dear to her, by her frankness, her droll wit, and natural amiability. Upon the beach, or in the Vallencour cottage, they had interminable confabs. Cecile then committed a fault against diplomacy which her youth rendered excusable, but which was none the less grave. She talked of her cousin Tracy with the gushing enthusiasm of a doting sister, badly serving the

cause which she fondly thought she was forwarding. Of Bellet, on the contrary, not a word, hoping that she would forget him ; it was a serious error. Aristides—the original, the ancient—was driven from Athens for having been too often surnamed “the Just.” Tracy found himself menaced in like manner, as his rival gained by silence all that the young officer lost. Nevertheless, certain noble and honorable traits of character recounted by Cecile, could not fail to interest her ; in spite of herself, more than once she had felt a warm flush of inward approbation mount to her cheeks when listening to her friend, and the opinion which she formed of Tracy, little by little, was of the kind that changes not, but is cherished during life, like inseparable companions, to the end. Lina said to herself that Tracy must be an incomparable friend, whose affectionate esteem would be very sweet and precious to her, but did not carry her conclusion further. How could she ? Her inner consciousness told her sometimes that Georges loved her, but she did not let the idea keep possession of her ; if he loved her, why

did he not take some means of letting her know it? She would then know just what she ought to think of it. At heart, she felt a secret resentment. All those who had aspired to her hand, with or without the pretext of a passion more or less sincere, had openly declared themselves. Why should this one, if he had any wish to make her his wife, not make serious advances? The self-love of the girl was wounded, and she looked upon it as the fault of him who had inflicted the slighting sting. And yet, or rather consequently, she thought of him often. But she thought yet oftener of Bellet. If she had really understood him, no doubt she could not have loved him; little blemishes, imperceptible vulgarities, little defects, almost invisible, in his whole manner, would have repelled the sympathy of the young girl, evoked by so many interesting and touching circumstances. His noble poverty, his filial love; his poetic sensibility, checked by the infamous privations to which he was subjected! Lina did not love him—no! The idea that she might love him made her throw up her head with an

involuntary gesture of wounded pride ; but she was much interested in him—more, indeed, than she was willing to confess to herself.

Meanwhile, the summer not having been very favorable, the beach of Dinard did not count a large number of celebrities. The “pack of suitors,” as Cecile irreverently called them, had not yet shown themselves, and all the signs presaged a season of tranquillity in the little colony, when an event transpired. An *aërolite*, if it had fallen upon the casino, would not have caused a greater sensation. It was not an *aërolite* ; it was not from heaven. The event was the arrival of Aristide Bellet.





CHAPTER XI.

IT was the 22d of July when the poet showed himself for the first time upon the beach at Dinard.

After the *Grand Prix*, he read every morning all the "removals and country retirements" of the society journals, and the evening before he had learned of the arrival of Lina at this beach. Immediately he slipped into his trunk, which had been a long time ready, a few shirts and a couple of sonnets, or rather a play in three acts, which he had procured from Bazoche. With laudable prudence he had made, some time previously, arrangements with a fellow-clerk to take his place at his desk any day he might find it necessary, and his departure had been made without difficulty. He had a month before him to kill; it was a short time, but, if he did not gain a definite victory in that time, he could at least make such good progress in his

affairs as to recommence the manœuvres in the coming winter. Lina was far from imagining the surprise that was in store for her. She was promenading quietly with her friend, under the eyes of their chaperons, seated in their watch-tower of willows.

"Aren't you happy?" said Cecile. "You can do and say just what you please. For me, when I go beyond the length of my nose—and you know it is not very long—or the end of my toes, mamma shoots at me a glance of admonition—what I call preventive glances—and I know that I must give up what is often dear to me."

"Your mother is not a cruel tyrant, either," laughed Lina.

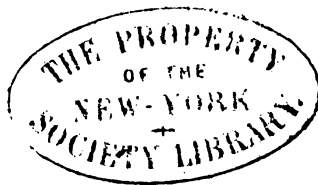
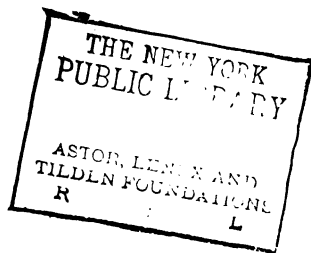
"Far from it. But I have five sisters, my dear, and, as mamma judiciously remarks, if each one of us makes a small infraction of propriety every day, that makes six infractions—forty-two infractions a week. You see what the total would amount to by the end of the year. And discipline reigns at our house as on board ship. I am expected to set an example."

Her gay visage became suddenly sober ; pinch-



"LINA," SAID SHE, IN A SERIOUS VOICE, "THAT IS MONSIEUR BILLET WHOM I SEE YONDER."

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ing the arm of her friend, she gave her a jerk which brought them both to a halt. "Lina," said she, in a serious voice, "that is Monsieur Bellet whom I see yonder."

"Where?" said Mademoiselle Lemartroy, who felt a slight inward shock.

"Right in front, before the cabins. You see him very well. It was you who asked him to come here, was it not?"

"No," replied Lina, with flushed face; "no, I have said nothing to him."

"All right. Because you know that Monsieur Bellet is one whom I detest."

"That is a good deal to say," replied the young lady, with enforced calmness.

"It is much less than I think," imprudently replied Cecile, losing in a single moment more ground than she could suspect. "He is ridiculous, and he is—he is all sorts of villanous things."

"You know nothing about it," retorted Lina, always irritated by contradiction.

"Perhaps! Well, anyhow, I know he has no business here. Has he not had enough, with all

the winter, of taking forlorn poses in the doorways ? ”

Bellet had already come forward with a graceful movement, his face lighted up with joy at the sight of her whom he loved. He saluted Cecile respectfully, and Lina with intense admiration, but in silence, and then stopped before them.

“My mother is over there, sir,” said Made-moiselle Barly, emphasizing the little slip of good taste, which Lina had remarked, not without a slight touch of annoyance.

Aristide was not a fool. He understood, and took the direction of the watch-towers, where Madame Vallencour and Madame Barly had taken refuge from the sun. There he bowed again, a little more profoundly than before, and planting himself firmly, mostly on his right leg, he assured the guardian of the heiress of all the pleasure which this unexpected meeting gave him.

“Unexpected ! ” said Madame Vallencour, with a shade of irony. “Chance has served you a good turn.”

"In truth," replied Bellet, after the slight hesitation which always preceded his responses, little embarrassing as the case was, "I could never have wished for a more pleasing meeting. Monsieur *de* Vallencour is well?"

"Monsieur Vallencour is well, thanks. Allow me to remark that we have neither one of us the least right to the preposition."

"Ah! pardon," said Aristide, somewhat discomfited, "I had imagined——"

"Not the least right, and not the least ambition," repeated the good lady.

Madame Barly, with averted face, was admiring the bay with a seriousness which betrayed her temptation to laugh. But our friend was not the man to allow himself to be discomposed; taking up a chair, he approached the watch-tower, without seating himself at first, but resting upon it while he talked. At last, he gave it a twirl with a certain air of ownership, and commenced a story so long and, withal, so interesting that Madame Barly, moved by such constancy, said finally, "Sit down, monsieur!"

Bellet fell so hastily and forcibly into the chair

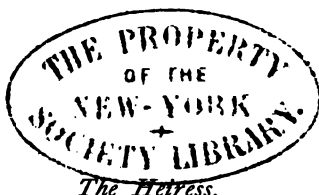
that he seemed to have been screwed fast to it all his life, and continued his story, without even inserting therein a superfluous comma or semicolon.

Madame Barly, entirely ignorant of the plots of her daughter, listened to the young man with interest, asking herself sometimes why her good friend Madame Vallencour evinced such a marked indifference toward so amiable a person.

Aristide reached at last the end of his story. After having added a few commonplaces, he arose, saluted, and retired without receiving an invitation to repeat his little séance. His profile was to be seen, for some half-hour after, against the blue surface of the sea, describing irregular arabesques at a short distance from the young ladies, but without approaching too near to them, then vanishing within the shades of the casino.

"You have received him coolly, poor Monsieur Bellet," said Madame Barly, resuming her charity knitting.

Madame Vallencour turned toward her friend a face suffused with an honest flush. "I cannot



bear him," said she, with a vivacity which astonished even herself. "He inspires in me an antipathy of which you cannot have the slightest idea. When I see him, when he speaks to me, it seems as if I were in the presence of a snail. Faugh!"

Madame Barly, in astonishment, let fall her ball of yarn, which she immediately picked up.

"Is it so bad as that?"

"Yes, just so bad. You see, dear madame, I hate fortune-hunters; and that is one of them under full sail—the perfection of the type."

"He has no fortune himself, as I have heard," replied the admiral's wife, indulgently, "but he has merit."

"Would you give him your daughter?" said Madame Vallencour, brusquely.

"I would make inquiries," prudently replied the mother of six marriageable girls; "but he is not personally objectionable."

"He is not worth a sou, he is a second-rate workman, he has made a fiasco of half a dozen marriages," returned Madame Vallencour, all in a breath. "I am disgusted with the manner of

his laying siege to Lina ; he is thirty-five years old—besides all of which, he commands no sympathy. He has an expression of falsehood.”

“He ! He appears to me, on the contrary, to have honest eyes.”

“He has an assured look, which is false, my dear friend,” retorted the other with warmth, “just as there are shining coins which are nothing but lead. Study him, and you will have a different opinion to give.”

“Oh, I,” said Madame Barly, with her weary motherly smile, “I don’t hold to him, you know. I don’t take his part in the least. Does Lina like him ?”

Madame Vallencour swept with her eye the beach and the groups constantly forming. The girls were talking with a number of safe companions—not the least sign of Bellet on the horizon ; she became a little more calm.

“The truth is, my good friend,” said she, confidentially, “that my ward is wrapped up in him.”

“It isn’t possible !” cried Madame Barly, involuntarily.

"There ! you must not say that ; it seems to you impossible. Well, it is as I say. Understand, I do not say she loves him, but that she is wrapped up in him. That is not at all the same thing. How has he bewitched her ? I do not know. And yet she is intelligent——"

"In the heart," suggested the confidante. "He must have made her acquaintance in a light that made him interesting. The earth-worm in love with a star !"

"Perhaps—probably. My husband and I are very sorry, and even distressed. We were congratulating ourselves that we were here sheltered from the humble but not mute adoration of that odious being, and now here he is."

"Do you think she could have told him ?"

"She ! Never in the world. She is much too proud. But he, who watches out for her, must have seen it in the papers. So much for the custom. One cannot stir a step but the whole world is informed of it. It is ridiculous and a bore."

Madame Barly smiled, amused by the unwonted vivacity of her friend. The two women were insensibly attracted to one another, which

had resulted in a mutual attachment in which affection or esteem has as great a part as friendship. The thought that Mademoiselle Lemartroy could see in Bellet the husband of her choice did not seem very serious to this mother of a family, anxious about the establishment of her children. One of the Barly daughters had hoped to marry Aristide, which had not seemed to her unreasonable ; but in her practical feminine soul she refused to accept for the heiress the idea of an alliance with a man who was not her equal either in fortune, or, in what was of more grave importance, education or social position.

"I feel like calling for help," said Madame Vallencour, after taking breath.

"Help ! as if the house were on fire ! And where would you find your help ? In another suitor ? "

"If I knew where to find him, I would have him here at as short notice as Penelope ; but at this time of year——"

"Have no fear, he will turn up very soon. The sands of this beach are very favorable to

that sort of vegetation," replied Madame Barly.

"That is not what I need," replied the guardian. "The aid that I think of calling for is not that of a suitor. It is Leo de Favieres."

Madame Barly laughed. "You have reason to say so ; he is quite the contrary of a suitor. It is told of him that he has contrived to escape nineteen matches to preserve his darling independence ; and good Madame de Favieres could not imagine why all of her projects fell through."

"Precisely ; he is my ally against Bellet."

"But he is his friend ; it was he who introduced him to you, I believe."

"The more reason for it. He did not introduce him to marry him. Suppose I write him to come ?"

"Why, certainly ; it seems to me an excellent idea," said Madame Barly, without the least malicious intent. "Leo is full of vivacity, he loves all Dinard, and, if he does you no other service, he will amuse us all, at least."

"Write ? no—telegraph," replied Madame

Vallencour, rising. "And I am going to do it immediately ; there is not a moment to lose."

The next morning, upon awaking, Leo received a blue paper which produced a most singular impression.

"Why am I necessary?" said he to himself. "Necessary to Madame Vallencour? Bellet must have arrived, I see that ; and the exquisite Cecile is down there, no doubt, with her friend. De Favieres to the rescue ! I am off this evening ; papa and mamma may follow me when they can."

He hastened to find his mother, who was at her breakfast, without an idea of the journey which would seem to her so inopportune.

"My adored mother," said he, kissing her, "you must pack up ; we are going to Dinard." Madame de Favieres let fall her buttered toast into her coffee.

"Dinard ! What for?" said she, anxiously.

"Madame Vallencour calls me. I adore her. Sh !" said he, mysteriously, placing his finger upon his lips, "Monsieur Vallencour knows nothing of it. Don't betray me."

"You are unbearable," said his mother, impatiently. "Can't you be serious five minutes?"

"Here, read!" he replied, handing her the blue paper with a theatrical gesture. "Is it true, or not, that that angelic woman needs my presence? Have you read it, yes or no? '*Come; I have need of you. Immediate.*' She did not say *immediately*, because it was too long: the operator could have called it two words."

"Leo, you will make me lose my mind," said Madame de Favieres, very much vexed. "Then you are going?"

"This evening. I would go at once, if there were a train; but the train has gone. And you, when will you come, with papa?"

"That summons—no, that appeal—has it anything to do with Mademoiselle Lemartroy?"

"My darling mother," said the criminal, without remorse, looking at her with tender pity, "could you suppose it was for anything else?"

"Then we will go," replied the abused mother, who at once resumed her composure.

And while packing the baggage, some hours afterward, she asked her husband :

"Have you ever imagined that there could be anything between Leo and Mademoiselle Lemartroy ?"

"I don't know," philosophically replied the painter, more disgusted than his wife with the *soi-disant* matrimonial mishaps of their son.

"Well, I would not have believed it. I had, so to say, renounced it. Notwithstanding, he is on the best of terms with Monsieur and Madame Vallencour. Can it be that Leo is a sly rogue, and wants to conceal his game ?"

"Do you know, my dear," said De Favieres with perfect composure, "I think Leo very malicious ; he leads us by the nose : and for him to do that, one need not be a wretch. But where is he leading us now ? That is what we know nothing about. It is all the same to us, is it not, provided we follow him ?"

"Oh, you talk as if we had spoiled him," said the mother, reproachfully.

The painter smiled, without replying. In this respect he was not at all deceived, but his

self-love felt no wound ; provided his son enjoyed life and loved him, he asked for no more. Happy wisdom ! is it not a pity that it is the exclusive privilege of the rich and independent ?





CHAPTER XII.

THE arrival of Leo was a veritable *coup de théâtre*. Bellet was very near being floored by it ; the présence of his comrade, who spared him no railleries, was calculated to worry him, notwithstanding he possessed so much *aplomb* that he knew how to turn them almost to his own advantage. Adroitly drawing to himself Lina's attention, the new-comer was obliged to occupy himself with Cecile, under pain of showing impoliteness. This combination did not seem to displease either one of the partners, and as the meetings took place almost always at some distance from the elder people, no one could perceive any unforeseen result from the strategy of Madame Vallencour. Pleasure parties and picnics in numerous shapes were organized on all hands, and the young friends were always invited to take part.

Aristide found means to make himself welcome to everybody. Making capital of his services as an intermittent editor of a short-lived periodical, he took the rôle of journalist ; even better than that—of journalist concealed under a triple pseudonym. Those around him gave free rein to their imagination in relation to him, and would have liked to drive away the mysterious potentate who could “talk of you in the papers.” By a rare train of circumstances, there was not a single journalist either at Dinard or in the neighborhood, which gave the usurper uncontested power ; and he abused it.

But yet, the so much hoped-for opportunity of a private interview with Lina did not present itself. Days passed away : he must return to hateful Paris, and his mean duties. Aristide had made some progress in the fancy of the lady, he could not doubt, but had he gained possession of her heart ?

The proud and reserved attitude of Mademoiselle Lemartroy gave him no certain clew. Although she listened to him with marked favor,

she forced him to seek her, but did not shun his confidences.

"Nothing venture, nothing gain," said Bellet one day to himself, brought to bay by necessity, as by a barrier. After having exhausted his small stock, he had asked of his friend Bazoché, by mail, some new verses ; but Bazoché was not in the humor, or, perhaps, he was not in Paris ; perhaps, also, his silence was due to the fact that Aristide had entirely omitted to enclose a postal order with his demand.

Bellet received nothing, while a splendid moon had silvered for the last two nights the delightful bend of the bay and the waves of La Rance. Must he lose such an opportunity to sing of nature and love, by which he was inflamed ? Heaven came to his aid ; it did not send him rhymes, but it procured for him the longed-for interview, at a moment when all seemed despair. The night was charmingly lovely ; the old people had taken the road to the casino to make up a card party, but all the younger ones were on the beach, basking in the pale light of a mist-enveloped moon. All at

once, an Italian orchestra was heard in the near distance. No one can imagine, without having heard it, the nervous emotion caused by the mixed tone of harps and violins, in the open air at night. However imperfect the execution, it seems as if the strong strings palpitate with our hearts, and awake within us mysterious vibrations. The airs repeated by Neapolitan singers take on an intensity of expression, of life and passion ; one feels a causeless impulse to tears—gushings of tenderness toward beings and things which have no existence, and of which one has never heard.

At the first sound of the harps, all the promenaders headed for the orchestra under full sail. The foreign musicians, to whom nobody would have paid any attention in Paris, took on, upon a distant beach, a quite peculiar attraction ; and besides idleness, an absence of event gives an importance to the smallest things.

Leo hastened toward the musicians, drawing with him the rest of a group among whom was Cecile. Lina, seated near the balustrade, had

not moved. Aristide felt that the time had come, and glided near to her.

"You are not going to see the Italians?" said the girl to him, with a bantering intonation. He shook his head slowly, without withdrawing his gaze from the beautiful moonlit face, and dropped himself into a low seat. The terrace was deserted; the sea, at full tide, vibrated regularly upon the pebbles with a heavy, dull roar; the harps twanged, and the violins sent heavenward pathetic invocations. Bellet brought all his courage and all his presence of mind to his aid, for the least mistake might ruin his hopes.

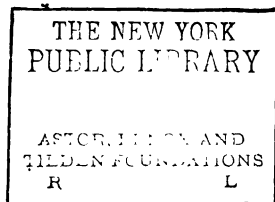
"What an evening!" said he, in a voice tremulous with genuine emotion, for it was inspired by fear. "Is it not one of the greatest griefs of life, to experience such moments without a to-morrow?"

Lina swept with her eye the silvery bay, where the black isles, lapped by the waves, seemed made of precious stones and sprinkled with diamonds. The evening was truly marvellous; such a one as she had never seen before. Was it true that such moments came but once, with-



"WHAT AN EVENING!" SAID HE, IN A VOICE TREMULOUS WITH GENUINE EMOTION.

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out return? And did the question pass through her troubled mind, "Is this also an impression destined never to return?" A melancholy pity took possession of her at the thought.

"Why no to-morrow?" she asked, in a less assured tone than usual. Aristide drew slightly nearer; so slight a movement that she could not perceive it.

"Because the roses die, and the spring flies away; because everything beautiful must pass away, everything that—makes up our happiness, perhaps our pride. Because I am going to leave you and resume my burden of misery, and never see you again." Lina turned toward him, her charming face animated by a kind of emotion.

"Never see me again? I don't understand," said she, with heightened color.

"You understand very well," said Aristide, with firmness. "You understand only too well, and I have lived too long near you. I am too much intoxicated by your presence. I ought to have avoided you, it is true. Knowing that you are not made to travel my poor earthly path, I ought, if I had been prudent, to have fled from

you, from the first day. I have not had the strength ; I have not had the power to put from me that unutterable joy. But now, fear nothing ; I shall know how to atone for the fault."

He had arisen as if to leave her. At that moment, in the pearly light, which cast a sort of aureole around him, he was handsome. An unassumed agitation gave an expression to his voice which Lina had never before heard, and his whole person shone with a kind of poetic inspiration. The poet, who had been able to reveal himself but imperfectly, was transformed into a comedian—into a comedian who only played his rôle by halves. That bizarre mixture of the true and the false lent him a real charm, redoubled by all the magic of the hour and the place. Lina was no more aware of her own feelings. His language, perfectly respectful in form, but which was at bottom the most audacious declaration of love, was new to her. She knew that some day she would marry—she had hoped to love the one whom she should make her husband ; but among all the hosts of black coats she had never dreamed of encountering

such burning words. Such things are the appanage of poets, the fruits of their musings ; but, in reality, it is not the style of language addressed to women, and yet it was to her that Bellet had addressed them. She was tempted to ask him to continue. The violins vibrated louder under their bows, the harps sobbed under the fingers, then the tones died away, plaudits rattled like a fusillade, then silence.

"They will be back here," thought Bellet, in secret rage, "and I have gained nothing." He was about to propose a promenade on the beach a little farther away, which would have infallibly spoiled all. The Italians came to his aid with a discreet prelude. A full, fresh tenor voice was heard. In a *salon* it would have seemed to lack culture, its accents would have appeared exaggerated, the emphasis of expression ridiculous ; but in the open air, in that ideal framework, the voice was one of love itself. Lina turned half around to listen, a crowd of confused thoughts, passionate desires, dreams of glory, aspirations for a world other than that in which correct young people had asked her to dance—all the

magic of nature and of love was revealed to her.

"Love with all your heart," sang the voice in Italian, sonorous and soft. Bellet spoke again.

"I am nothing," said he, "and you are all. Beautiful, rich, adored, you will have passed in my life like an apparition. Always and everywhere I will carry the remembrance of the time when I have known you. Never would any but you have known what there was of nobility and goodness in my soul. My poor mother will now become again what she was to me before this meeting, the beginning and the end of my—not of my thoughts, they are always of you—but of my consideration. May she be happy, the dear woman! For her I have the courage to conceal my sorrow."

Lina cast upon the young man a look of tenderness. She was always touched by any allusion to a mother. What would she not have given to be able to feel still the tender caresses of her own?

"How you love her!" she said, in a voice of infinite sweetness.

"Yes, I love her," replied Aristide, with warmth. "And yet that love, I am ashamed to say, is nothing in comparison with that with which you inspire me. For her I would be a brave boy, a faithful employee, earning honorably a livelihood in a distasteful, wearing occupation. And if you knew how much courage it takes to accomplish conscientiously work without interest! For you, I would have been a poet, perhaps a man of eminence. Ah! to be worthy of you, I would have attained an ideal that until now I have only had a glimpse of. My fictions would have taken form, my dreams would have become realities; glory would not then have seemed inaccessible. Yes, I feel—I am sure of it—that with your love I should have been somebody. But of what good are fancies? Could an heiress like you love a poor devil like me?"

Lina was piqued to the quick. Contradiction always found in her a most sensitive subject. Why did Bellet imagine that she could not feel a disinterested sentiment? Angry and affected at the same time, she turned quickly toward him.

"Why do you speak that way?" said she. "Do you think me incapable of noble feeling?"

"God forbid! but there is so much difference between the pity which I may have inspired in you, and—what I have ambitiously hoped."

Chords of harmony vibrated in the dazzling light of the moon, at last clear of mist; the waves were calmed to ripples, lighted up by a dim phosphorescence, and all at once two voices, one a tenor, one a bird-like soprano, rose together in a love song. "Ah!" they sang, "if thou knewest the tortures of love."

Lina felt herself shaken throughout her being with an indescribable nervous tremor. The voices, and the night combined, enveloped her in a softness and enervating rapture from which nothing could protect her.

"Such a difference," repeated Bellet, without removing from her face his passionate gaze. The young girl felt suffocated, and the tears came to her eyes in spite of herself. A great lassitude seemed to overcome, all at once, all the efforts, the instinctive rebellion of her will. She

lost her self-control, and felt herself drawn by a violent current toward an unknown goal.

"You know nothing about it," said she, without exactly comprehending the sense of her words.

"Would it be possible?" said Bellet, drawing near, but without even touching the folds of her dress. He bent toward Lina, who turned away her head, ashamed, surprised, but yet moved. "Have you understood what I have kept most closely concealed in the bottom of my heart? Do you know that, in spite of all that keeps us asunder, I am worthy of you—that my obscure name will become illustrious, and that you may be proud to bear it? Have you seen all that? Say, adored one, blessed one, revered one! Do you wish that I may be great, and that you may be celebrated? Do you wish it? Ah, how I love you—how I shall ever love you! And this sacred hour will make of me a man above mortals. My best beloved, from this moment you and I, hand in hand, enter immortality."

He was about to seize her hand, and thus lose all his labor; but a kind fate interfered.

The sound of voices and of steps announced that the circles of listeners had broken up. Lina arose. "Leave me, monsieur," said she, firmly ; "we must not be found together alone."

"But to-morrow you will allow me to speak to you, will you not ? You do not banish me ?"

"To-morrow, the same as any other day ; go, monsieur, they are coming." By a graceful and very dexterous movement Bellet stepped over the balustrade, and leaped upon the gravel walk, just as the musical amateurs arrived upon the terrace.

Cecile ran to her friend with some uneasiness.

"Are you there ?" said she. "I thought you had gone in."

"I have remained here."

"All alone ? Have you not been tired ?"

"I am not tired," Lina replied, evasively.

Leo, whose lynx eye missed nothing, had spied a masculine form leap from the terrace. Leaning carelessly upon the railing, his back toward the sea, he kept himself in the background, and swept the walk with his eye. It was surely his friend Aristide who was making rapid strides, sending the pebbles flying from his heels.

"Look!" said Leo, who felt a sudden accession of fury. "There is Aristide, in search of rhymes; I believe he will find a *rhume* instead." Lina rose in displeasure.

"Are you going in?" she asked of Cecile.

"What, so early? It is delightful out here."

"I am tired." A dozen voices were raised, offering escort, which she declined. Cecile then turned rather sulkily toward their villa, after having despatched Leo to call her mother. Madame Vallencour came also. In two words the young man told her her strategic mistake, and pointed out the probable peril.

"Console yourself, monsieur," said the excellent woman; "sooner or later, he would have found means to speak to her."

"A little later would have given us a little more time," murmured Leo. "I will never forgive myself. But, after all, what do we know about it? He has perhaps said nothing at all to her."

"We will know all about it to-morrow," replied Madame Vallencour, hastening to her ward.



CHAPTER XIII.

LINA passed a most singular night ; such as she had never before experienced. A kind of fever which kept her awake made her, a few hours later, open the window for breath—perhaps to recall the magic of the picture of which she had formed so prominent a part. The moon cast a cold splendor upon the sea, the mists had fled, there was now no dampness nor obscurity. Everything was dry and hard ; the waves rolled in spangles—like flashes of broken crystal—driven by a northwest wind. Lina closed her window, and tried to retire within herself. Was she really engaged ? Had she imprudently given herself to that man, without knowing that she loved him ?

The memory of the passionate music, of the blended voices, of the exquisite splendor in

which she had been bathed, came back to her with an intoxicating sweetness.

Yes, the words of Aristide had seemed sweet and flattering. It was an exciting thing, that burst of genius in an atmosphere of luxury and art. Lina's self-love was flattered at the thought that this husband would owe to her his fortune. Ignorant of real life, thanks to the unique, absolute affection which had made her prefer to all else, the society of her father, she could easily imagine that a man enriched by her would prove grateful to her. Why not? To the proud and noble soul of Lina, gratitude had never been a burden. She recalled at that hour, with tender feeling, the comforting words of the old cook, her only support in her trouble at the moment when she had realized the awful misfortune which had made her an orphan. Lina had never felt any haughtiness with her inferiors; on the contrary, she had loved them, commiserated them, and believed them worthy. And her pride was not wounded in the least, at the thought that her husband would owe everything to her. She experienced no sense of humiliation in the knowl-

edge that he was not of the same social class with herself : had he not said that he would become famous ? In a mere clerk, she would not have accepted such inferiority, no paper scratcher in an office would have been allowed to talk to her in such a way ; but a poet was altogether outside of all ordinary conventionalities. It was quite worth while to be a perfectly well-bred young lady. It is always flattering to be celebrated in verse ; poetry established between herself and Bellet a fragile bridge, like a rainbow, and they could trust to that bridge as long as they did not approach too near to it.

She slept a little before daylight, without having come to any decision regarding herself ; very listless, enervated, and at the same time excited—in a state of mind not altogether without its charm, but in which she felt herself more impressionable than ever. At her awakening, the broad daylight hurt her eyes and the sounds of life offended her. In the first place, she had not had sufficient sleep ; then she wished to prolong her rest, inasmuch as she had still more time before her. The loyalty

of her nature revolted at anything that might look like a mysterious secret. She must speak that very day to Madame Vallencour about the affair of the night before, and the necessity of acting promptly, made the task painful to her. She dressed herself leisurely, and descended, with a slower step than usual, to the morning meal. Monsieur Vallencour, warned by his wife, had already disappeared, to give opportunity for a more confidential tête-à-tête. He was not far off, though ; within hearing of their voices, he was reading his paper upon the terrace in front of the cottage.

At her first sight of Lina, Madame Vallencour saw that the day was to be a stormy one ; certain little wrinkles between the eyebrows indicated a kind of humor that she had learned to know and to fear.

However perfect her education might have been, however correct she had been in her deportment, a year and more could not pass in the life of a young girl without little differences between her and those who had the task of chaperoning her. In every case, heretofore, Lina had

yielded, in obedience to a natural feeling of politeness. Was she not, in reality, the hostess of those excellent people, and was it not her duty to make them as happy as possible? But such a spirit of conciliation cannot be maintained without little involuntary manifestations of displeasure or ennui. Until now, Mademoiselle Lemartroy had only resisted to a sufficient extent to make them appreciate the value of her concessions; the resistance had existed, nevertheless, and Madame Vallencour had often asked herself what would be the upshot when the sentiment of propriety would become less strong with Lina than the instinct of opposition. When she saw the girl enter the breakfast-room on that August morning, she realized that it would not be long before the problem would be solved.

"Are you rested from your fatigue, darling?" she asked, offering her a cup of tea.

"Thank you, I am very well," answered Lina with a smile, but without looking at her guardian. She quickly swallowed the liquid amber, and set her cup aside with an air of deliberation. "Dear madame," said she, without giving her-

self time to reflect, "I have something to tell you." The sentence was anticipated, yet Madame Vallencour felt a little nervous creep between her shoulders. She had foreseen the moment when the question of marriage would be put, but should it be by Lina herself? As she could do nothing else, she listened, arming herself with courage. "Dear madame," repeated the young girl, "last evening Monsieur Aristide Bellet made me an offer of marriage."

"Made *you* an offer, my dear child?" impulsively asked the guardian.

"Yes, me! I know that is not in accordance with our usage, but it is with English custom, and he did it in a perfectly proper manner."

"He should have made it to Monsieur Vallencour or me, to be proper; but if it is in the English style— But what did you answer him?"

Lina felt her face flush. She had sworn that such a thing should never occur, but how could she help blushing?

"Nothing positive," she replied. Ashamed of this reply, which was not strictly true, she

added, quickly, "I ought to say that I did not discourage him."

Madame Vallencour laid her right hand upon her left, and kept silence. Lina felt more and more annoyed ; a kind of smothered anger swelled within her. What right had any one to receive her communication with so much coldness ? Was she not free in her choice ? The silence, continuing, became intolerable ; the girl could not bear it.

"Why do you say nothing ?" she said, suddenly, with warmth, looking at her guardian.

"Because I have nothing to say," replied Madame Vallencour, in a tone of calmness which exasperated Lina still further. "You inform me of a proposition of marriage, and at the same time say that you have not discouraged the author. I await your explanation of the motives which have led you to such behavior."

"Monsieur Bellet appears to me sufficient cause to render any other reason unnecessary," replied Mademoiselle Lemartroy. Madame Vallencour arose, and seated herself by Lina's side. Without allowing herself to be prevented by a

feeble resistance, she took the small icy fingers which had made the defensive effort, into her warm maternal hand.

"We are sadly at odds," said she, smiling; "if we keep on in this way, we shall find it hard to understand each other. We would better take a fresh start from the beginning—shall we? We say, then, that Monsieur Bellet has asked for your hand, and that you have not said no. You like him, then?"

"Certainly," replied Lina, turning away her head. She espied the back of Monsieur Vallencour upon the terrace, busy with his newspaper, which gave her some apprehension of seeing a second adversary enter the lists.

"If he pleases you, that is enough, my dear child; there is nothing more to ask of him. It is for us—for Monsieur Vallencour, I mean—alone, for it is he who is invested with powers. As for me, I am only a friend. It is for your guardian to do the rest—that is to say, to make necessary inquiries, in order to be assured that your suitor is really worthy of you, as he appears."

That last sentence, short as it was, cost a considerable effort on the part of the good lady, who was displeased with Bellet in every way ; but it was a sacrifice to diplomacy, and she accomplished it conscientiously. Mademoiselle Lemartroy did not appreciate the effort in the least. "It is taking rather too much trouble, perhaps," said she, haughtily. "The reputation of Monsieur Bellet has never been questioned, that I know of——"

"My darling," interrupted Madame Vallengour, "young girls do not know everything. It is for us to do what your father would have done, if he were living ; we make no other effort, nor have any other desire, but to take his place, and we will do so to the best of our ability, you may be sure. Just as your father had, we have only your happiness at heart ; but happiness requires consideration, and if you give up the name you bear, it must be for a name as worthy."

After speaking thus, she rose and went to join her husband, whom she snatched away from the delights of his journal, to plunge him

without preparation into all the perplexities of his rôle as guardian. Lina, in much ill humor, returned to her chamber, from which she looked out at the gulls flying over the sea. She was not satisfied, either with herself or with others ; everybody seemed to her either disagreeable or hostile. It was not thus that she had painted to herself her entrance upon the rôle of *fiancée*, when she used to dream of her future life. Without arriving at any precise ideas, she had, in a confused way, expected to see smiles around her, and benevolent faces, and herself proud and satisfied in a serenity of resolution approved by all. She had dreamed of entering into this new life through a triumphal arch. Must she quarrel, and argue ? Was it by unseemly contention that the dawn of her engagement was to be accompanied ? Certainly, there was enough in these thoughts to perturb Lina's proud soul, and yet they were not her greatest trouble. While provoked and angry at the strait-laced views of Madame Vallengour, who could not understand the grandeur of this marriage, in which fortune and talent

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levelled all inequalities, she felt in the recesses of her soul an uneasiness which was not the effect of exterior causes. Already, the night before, she had felt this uneasiness when Bellet had declared his passion without reserve : in passion many little faults are excused, and this one had been passed over almost unperceived. But by daylight, deprived of its poetic framing of moonlight and music, his avowal had lost most of its glamour, and the uneasiness increased. How had Bellet had the hardihood to speak to her ? Had she encouraged him by her attitude toward him ? Lina felt the blood rush to her cheeks at the remembrance of his words, and, above all, at what she had herself said in reply. She had encouraged him ; more than that, she had almost engaged herself. Why that *almost* ? Her loyalty permitted no subterfuge with herself. She had consented to be his wife.

The scorching sun beat upon the blinding sand ; every-day life followed its usual routine, within the cottage and without ; cries, calls, the braying of donkeys, the cackling of hens and crowing of cocks, the clatter of saucepans in the

kitchen, that of crockery and silverware in the dining-room when the table was being set—that was the daily life. That was the prose, and in the midst of that prose, the image of Aristide Bellet gained nothing.

“I have said it,” sighed Lina, arousing herself from her unpleasant meditations; “I have said it, and it shall be.”

She seated herself before her mirror, and dressed herself as usual, with no more particular care, but her eyes expressed her sadness.





CHAPTER XIV.

MONSIEUR VALLENCOUR received without flinching his wife's communication. He had for a long time foreseen this result ; though, in truth, he could hardly imagine that Bellet could find means to speak directly to Mademoiselle Lemartroy.

"I will take him in hand," he said to his wife, "in the proper way. I will require references, which will not prove satisfactory, and I will send the young man off."

"That will not be so easy as you think," replied she. "Lina is headstrong——"

"I know it. I have experienced it. Make yourself easy, we will master the situation."

Madame Vallencour was not at all so sure. While awaiting breakfast, she went in search of Leo, her habitual confidant. She found him in

the midst of a group of girls, to whom he was explaining a complete theory of the art to win at *petits chevaux*.* Cecile was listening with her cherry lips half open, following his reasoning with rapt attention. When he shut his mouth, after having said, "Then, you see it, mesdemoiselles," she demanded, in an artless way :

"You are sure that one may win that way, monsieur ?"

"Absolutely, mademoiselle."

"Then why does it happen that *you* lose every time ?" The little circle laughed aloud.

"Permit me, mademoiselle. When I lost, it was before I discovered my theory."

Madame Vallencour took advantage of the merriment to touch Leo lightly with her parasol. He turned quickly, saw her, and, leaving his auditors, led her aside.

"Has anything happened ?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Bellet has proposed," he cried, without hesitation.

* Little horses—a gambling game.

"Has he told you?" asked Madame Vallengour, in surprise.

"No danger of his telling it, but I see it in your face, dear madame. Does it take on the proportions of a catastrophe, that you are so unnerved by it?"

"Almost," she replied, laughing in spite of herself. She told him all she knew.

"I was afraid of it; that is to say, I should have been afraid of it. It is my fault; no, it is the fault of those Italians last night. Oh, such music ought to be prohibited; there is nothing in the world more immoral. And then, is he going to make his proposal to you—my friend Bellet?"

"I presume so."

"And how are you going to answer discreetly?"

"Politely and without promising anything. We must gain time and make some inquiries."

"At the '*Sécurité des Familles*,' 'celerity and discretion'—that will not be of much service. What is necessary is to tenderly lead my friend Bellet to commit some gross act of folly."

"He is upon his guard," said Madame Vallencour.

"Yes, but not always ; and then, we expect reinforcements."

"We ?" asked the excellent lady, in amazement.

"I know what I am saying ; yes, we, you—we, in fact. You will see. To gain time, that is our point. Would you like a consultation ?"

"That is what I came to ask."

"Consultation with me ! With Leo !" soliloquized the young man, in parenthesis. "That is what I must make mamma understand. She would die of joy, would mamma, if she knew that wise and experienced people had recourse to me in their difficulties.

"All right," addressing Madame Vallencour, "I will give you this counsel freely, certain that you will not follow it afterward ; if you did follow it, it would be no longer counsel, for it is the nature of advice to be asked for, and not followed. Don't make too much opposition ; be prudent, lead him on. If I dare use the simile, the goat and the cabbage ; the cabbage—

that is Aristide, my friend Aristide, the sweet Bellet."

Madame Vallencour looked at Leo in bewilderment. All at once, a smile spread over her amiable face.

"Perfectly," said she. "We do not favor contradiction. Do you advise me to appear to approve, temporarily?"

"Hypocrisy, dear madame! You will be incapable of it. If you could maintain a position of neutrality, it would be a fine point gained. For myself, be sure that I will lose no time."

Madame Vallencour returned, under escort of her sage counsellor, to her house. The cottage occupied by Madame Barly was very near, and the white dresses of the admiral's six daughters might be seen whisking right and left, here and there, in the little garden. Leo, finding himself alone, assumed a listless, idle air, as one who knows not what to do with his time. Meanwhile the hotel bell called loudly to breakfast, and in his mental vision he saw his mother unfolding her napkin, while she gazed uneasily at the door through which everybody was passing but him-

self. But he smothered his remorse, or, rather, his remorse slept tranquilly. He had just espied, as he sauntered in, the pretty face of Cecile above the garden wall. Apparently very busy, she was watering her flowers with a watering-pot which no longer contained a drop of water. Her sisters turned their backs to her, and went toward their cottage.

"Mademoiselle," said Leo, in a low voice. She must have had a very quick ear, for she raised her head at once. "Can you bring Tracy here at once?"

Cecile regarded him wonderingly, but without the least embarrassment. "At once, without warning, and must I do it?"

"*Dame!*" said Leo, "if I did it he would not come at all, perhaps. I know him very little, though I love him much."

The girl reflected. Two or three sharp voices called from the interior of the house: "Cecile! Cecile! come to breakfast."

She picked up her watering-pot. "Send him a telegram," she said, deliberately.

"His address?"

"Tracy, Beauclair, Nièvre. He is at his mother's."

"And the contents?"

"Come immediately."

"As it was to me," said Leo, laughingly.

"And the signature?"

"Cecile," said she, bravely.

The voices from the interior, increased and reënforced, repeated that name like a brawling echo.

"I am coming," she cried, without hurrying.

"Tell me, at least, what is the matter?" said she, turning her rosy face toward Tracy's ally.

"Bellet has proposed and, as it seems, been accepted."

"Cecile!" cried the majestic voice of Madame Barly.

"Yes, mamma," replied the girl. "That is a pretty piece of business. Tell me, Monsieur Leo, is there no way of drowning him? I am sure he cannot swim."

"It might be tried," replied Leo, gravely.

With a little, very encouraging nod, and a suppressed laugh, the young girl glided toward

the cottage, scrambled up the terrace on a run, and darted into the shade of the porch like a bird.

Hidden by a slim tamarind, Leo watched her regretfully, as if he had startled a fawn. "It must be said she is full of spirit," thought he. "Ah, if I were not so firmly resolved not to marry! It is a pity that I am so decided. I shall never forgive myself." He could not help laughing as he twisted his fine mustache and directed his steps toward the telegraph office. Upon the official telegraph paper he wrote the short despatch, and signed it with the prenom of his young friend.

A little before four o'clock Aristide presented himself at the house of Monsieur Vallencour. He was awaited with a firm stand. However much Lina longed to be present, she did not dare to appear when he arrived. Hidden in her chamber, she awaited his departure, to come down. Monsieur Vallencour was not an eagle, but he was a sensible man, with a tender heart and generous spirit. Bellet was no more to his liking than to that of his wife. Still, he did not

wish to condemn him upon impulse. He subjected him to certain inquiries, excusing himself upon the ground of his rôle as guardian—a position infinitely more scrupulously responsible than that of parent. The result of these interrogatories was not favorable to the suitor. The natural questions, simply put, were nearly all answered to the detriment of the unfortunate individual, in spite of all the pains he took to play as fine a rôle as possible. No fortune, but a lucrative position? No. Expectations, then? Upon the question of expectations, Aristide could deceive. He spoke of a rich cousin without children, who loved him very much, but omitted to state that the cousin had willed his property ten years ago, in sight and knowledge of all the world, in favor of his native town.

"To sum up, sir," resumed Monsieur Vallengour, who had just taken up his spectacles and set them firmly upon his nose, "your social position is that of an appreciated poet, author of a volume of poems and of several novels; that is honorable, very honorable."

"Homer was a poet, monsieur." A heavy

silence fell upon Aristide, with this unfortunate allusion to a mendicant poet, although an illustrious one. He felt the necessity of retrieving the mistake. "I know well how unworthy I am, and would never have dared to present myself if I had not been encouraged by Mademoiselle Lemartroy herself."

"So we have understood," benignantly replied Monsieur Vallencour. "Your proposal does us honor in the person of our ward, and we will take it into serious consideration. You will permit us, nevertheless, to withhold an immediate answer, as we need to consult. So grave a matter cannot be lightly decided."

"Before engaging myself for life, on my part, I have reflected," said Bellet, gravely, saluting Lina's guardian. He bowed to Madame Vallencour, who had not said a word, and departed, with some polite gentlemanly expressions.

"That is what you call preserving neutrality, is it?" said he, returning to his wife.

"What would you have, my dear? It was not my fault. When I saw his hypocritical face, my fine resolutions all fled, and all I could do

was to say nothing. And then, you have settled the matter yourself ! ”

“ I have fulfilled my duty,” said Monsieur Vallencour, sententiously. “ And now, what are we going to say to Lina ? ”

“ The truth ; and to maintain our position in the truth, we must set seriously about gaining information. I am going to write to Paris, and while waiting for replies, we will begin with Favieres.”

The replies received were hackneyed and insignificant commonplaces, eulogistic for the most part, but in terms which deprived the eulogies of all value.

“ It is astonishing,” said Madame Vallencour ; “ it is just as it is when one asks for recommendations of a domestic. They are always perfect, irreproachable ; and when one has them, the question comes up, upon what galley they have been rowing until they have been imprudently allowed to enter our service.”

“ What would you have ? Every one has not the courage of his opinions. One says, ‘ Let them go and get hanged somewhere else,’ and

they thus give the means to rogues to make new dupes."

"Ah, if everybody were like me," cried the lady with energy, "such people would soon be gotten rid of. The masters should have an understanding not to give recommendations that were not absolutely true, and those who have not fulfilled their engagements should no longer be received in good society."

"You are rather fast," said he, laughing; "you would soon see nobody. At the end of a month you would be all alone with Truth, and you would have as many enemies as you had had friends. We must submit to the ills which we cannot prevent, my dear wife."

"We will not submit to accept this Bellet as a husband for Lina," replied Madame Vallencour, becoming quite belligerent. "Leo has promised me to find out something, and I shall be much astonished if it is satisfactory."

Meantime, Aristide had assumed, in presence of Lina, the attitude of an accepted lover. He walked by her side on the beach, talked to her in whispers, gazed at her lovingly, with a want

of breeding with which she would have been shocked, if the conduct of those around her had not kept her in a continual state of anger. Everybody disapproved of Bellet's behavior, that was plain, and blamed her meanwhile for allowing it. Madame Barly, with her wondering eyes, the five Mesdemoiselles Barly, who did not hesitate to whisper and laugh behind the poet's back, the silence of Monsieur and Madame Vallencour, all combined to humiliate the proud girl; but this humiliation was changed to anger against those who inflicted it, and confirmed Lina in her obstinacy.

One evening, after having dismissed her *femme de chambre*, she seated herself at her window, and was sadly meditating, when old Marianne entered softly. Without pretext of asking her commands, she walked a few moments around her young mistress; then, suddenly taking courage: "Is it true, mademoiselle," said she, "that Monsieur Bellet, who is every day on the beach, and who is always talking to you——"

"Well, what?" said Lina, haughtily, all her

pride up in arms, and on the defensive in a moment.

"Is it true that he has asked you to marry him?"

"Suppose he has?" demanded Lina in the same tone.

Marianne made no reply, but continued to walk about the chamber arranging this and that.

"Why have you asked me that question?" insisted Mademoiselle Lemartroy.

"Because nobody speaks well of him, mademoiselle, and it would be a great shame if a good and beautiful young lady——"

"Marianne," said the heiress, pettishly, "I engaged you to attend to your own business, and that alone——"

"Mademoiselle is right," said the good woman, resuming the manner of a well-trained servant. "I ask pardon of mademoiselle."

She walked to the door, about to make her exit. Lina suddenly recollected how she had wept upon the bosom of this humble friend, the day she found herself an orphan. A sob rose to her throat, but she repressed it.

"Marianne!" said she. The housekeeper returned, and stood immovable in expectation. "Your intentions are good, Marianne, and I thank you for them. I know you love me well."

"Mademoiselle does not deceive herself in that," added the domestic. "I wish mademoiselle good night."

Lina felt her bosom swell at having repulsed the woman, who wished only to serve her. She arose, detaining her on one pretext or another, and approaching and talking to her at the same time, placed her slender white hand upon the large coarse one, with a friendly pressure. The honest eyes of Marianne were raised to the pretty face, softened by an affectionate smile.

"Mademoiselle Lina, you may be angry if you will, and I will go away so as not see you in anger; but the commandant would not have liked that man for a son-in-law. Good night, my dear good lady. May the good God keep you!"

While speaking she had opened the door, and closed it behind her as she pronounced that last word. Agitated, discontented, sorrowful, Lina

returned to the window. Everybody was interfering in the matter. They had all evidently resolved, even her faithful servant, to prevent her from following her inclination. They would not force her, nevertheless, to change her mind. The more they were against Aristide the more she would cling to him, to do him justice—yes, justice !

And the next day, proudly, almost haughtily, she resumed her ordinary attitude, in spite of the general blame which she saw bearing upon Bellet, and the pity, more galling still, by which she seemed to be herself surrounded.

Leo and Cecile, only, seemed to suspect nothing ; they joked and laughed, teasing each other as usual, but always in the near neighborhood of Lina, in a way to leave her not a moment alone with Bellet. All of which troubled Aristide but little ; he poured confidences into one ear, while Cecile chattered close to the other. He told in detail of his sad infancy, his laborious youth, of his dreams of glory—he never alluded to his dreams of fortune. He recounted the patient and obscure devotion of his saintlike mother, and made rapid but seductive incursions

into the domain of dubious Bohemia, knowing that the imagination of young girls is often excited upon subjects which they cannot understand.

All this amused Lina, often interested her, and sometimes touched her; but Aristide would have run much risk of exciting her displeasure, but for the spirit of opposition which set him upon a pedestal. Approved by all, he would very soon have lost his prestige with her. That was what Leo was continually repeating to Madame Vallencour. "But I cannot tell her to marry him," cried the excellent lady, impatiently.

The situation became more and more perplexing. A week had passed since Bellet's proposal; expected information was still of a very vague nature; nobody could vouch for anything. Monsieur Vallencour said he would go to Paris and delve down to the bottom of the matter, but his wife was afraid to remain alone to carry the weight of all the responsibility. Everybody was in a bad humor except Cecile and Leo, who seemed perfectly satisfied with existence, when Tracy arrived.



CHAPTER XV.

THE weather was fearful. From early dawn till evening the tempest had raged unceasingly upon the bay of Saint Malo, interrupting communication, blowing down telegraph poles, and ravaging the gardens of the peaceful cottages. That of Madame Vallencour had been almost exempt, but Cecile's flower-bed had received such masses of sea water as to render her water-pot forever afterward useless, all being torn away and scattered upon the sands and the gravel road. The bathers, accustomed to more politeness on the part of Father Neptune, when making such visits as they wished to make him, showed themselves in no gentle mood. They tried during the evening to repair to the casino, but the rain, which fell in torrents, discouraged the most of them : those who had ventured, felt a deep melancholy take possession of them, while the

wind whistled through the timbers and made the frail edifice tremble. The efforts of the musicians failed to drown the lugubrious sounds without or to enliven the solitude within.

Leo himself, so valiant in the presence of the *little horses*, left off playing, finding himself almost alone.

At ten o'clock, unheard-of event, all the inhabitants of Dinard were in their beds, although perhaps not one among them could close an eye before morning.

Quiet came with the dawn, and every one slept; even Bellet, who felt all night extremely melancholy and depressed. Things did not go to his liking—not at all. He found Lina too cold. According to his idea, a young person who has consented to marry a man, not only can but *ought* to show outward signs of regard. Now, Lina not only gave no outward signs of her regard, but was, on the contrary, altogether frigidly reserved.

"She is free, confound it all!" said Bellet to himself, as he turned all night in his bed, as if the mattress were filled with nails, point up-

ward. "No imbecile guardian, nor old pretender like Madame Vallencour, could prevent her from marrying me if she loves me. And she does love me. If not, why has she accepted me? She does not love me enough, that is all. She must love me more!"

Bellet began to concoct a plan, made up of passion and audacity, to make himself loved as much as he wished; but having become more calm thereby, fatigue got the better of him, and he fell sound asleep.

He awoke very late. There were loud noises upon the creaking stairs; busy feet were running up and down without restraint, and voices called from one story to the other. Full of disgust over the intruders who disturbed his repose, Aristide rubbed his eyes, when all at once he took in the idea of the time. It must be at least ten o'clock. Why so much noise? Something must have happened! Bellet looked out of the back window, and saw nothing but people running toward the sea. No one could tell what for, but the impression that something had happened gave wings to the slowest and quickened

the laziest. Aristide was up in a trice, dressed in less than no time, and ran down stairs, making more noise than anybody else. He soon learned what made the people run : a little coaster, in trying to go through the strait, had run upon a rock. The five or six men who could be seen, were perched among the rigging ; with spyglasses, they could be distinctly seen fighting the furious waves. It rained no longer now, and the wind had very much abated, but the chopping sea leaped from all quarters, throwing into the air great sheaves of foam, like water-spouts. All Dinard was on the beach, as much as possible, in the condition of the breakers. The sea began to fall, which exposed the public to less danger, but increased the labor of those who strove to launch the life-boat.

Bellet, without a sentiment of pity for the shipwrecked people, or sympathy with those who were trying to save them, sent his eyes in search of his sweetheart. She was there, in the centre of a compact group—huddled close together instinctively—made up of the three families of Barly, Favieres, and Vallencour. He

boldly advanced toward the charmed circle. As he made his salutation, the wind tore from his hand his light felt hat, threatening to carry it to Saint Énogat.

Aristide instinctively ran in chase, to the unspeakable joy of the Misses Barly. The faster he ran, the less the malicious hat—perhaps at the suggestion of Cecile's glance—seemed to be willing to be caught. Cecile, suddenly laughing aloud, squeezed the arm of Lina, who remained apparently impassive, but with set teeth and a hard expression of countenance.

A prodigious bound of the hat sent it so high that Bellet, stretching up his hand to catch it, stumbled against a heap of pebbles, and fell flat with his nose in the sand.

"Ah!" said Cecile, with hands pressed upon her heart, faint from the effort to suppress her laughter, "why is it so laughable to see a man chasing his hat? I don't know anything more delightfully amusing! It is killing!"

Lina, by a brusque movement, disengaged her arm; the girl felt that she had wounded her. Looking around, she endeavored to learn the

extent of her imprudence, without success ; her friend was mute and immovable. Aristide had captured his head-gear, somewhat damaged, and returned with the smiling air of a man who feels himself a laughing-stock. Except in the Barly group, nobody had even seen his misadventure. All eyes were fixed upon the distressed coaster. He insinuated himself by some unknown process of infiltration behind Mademoiselle Lemartroy, and whispered in her ear :

“The wreck of the *Saint Geran*—it is a spectacle worthy of eternal pity, is it not, mademoiselle ? ”

Lina thought the comparison out of place, but she inclined her head slightly without reply, not wishing to find fault with her *quasi-fiancé*. He stayed by her, mechanically adjusting upon his head the hat which had cost him so much effort.

“They have very hard work launching their boat,” said Leo, who had been watching the life-saving crew. “For a time like this, they are too few. And all those imbeciles, who stand there looking on, without lending a hand to help——”

Cecile gave him a sidelong glance, as she did very often, with a laugh upon her lips waiting for leave to vent itself ; Leo turned toward her, a thing which also often happened, it must be admitted, and surprised the mirth in her pretty blue eyes.

"Yes ! that's a fact ; it is I who am imbecile, without discouraging others. If I die, let me be buried," he added, with a serio-comic gesture.

He started upon a double-quick. His mother called him : "Leo, where are you going ? Don't expose yourself, my child," she cried aghast.

"There is no danger, mamma," he replied, making a speaking trumpet of his hands ; "I am not going on the water." Madame de Favieres, much agitated, made a start as if she would run after him, but her husband held her back.

"Let him go," said he, with an authority which he hardly displayed on ordinary occasions. "You always treat him as a child ; you must not forget that he is a man."

The pretty face of Cecile expressed her entire approbation, and she drew near to Madame de

Favieres. The latter, much moved, without taking her eyes from her son, took instinctively under her arm another little arm, which never trembled. The saving crew fought the winds and the waves, and struggled with the soft and slippery beach. One oar was broken, and another carried away by the waves. Dinard is not like many other maritime towns, peopled by sailors ; it is a pleasure resort, where there is no preparation for catastrophes. But the example of Leo had a good effect, and many bathers, who the night before would have been afraid of soiling their beautiful bathing costumes, struggled with him at the heavy boat, which moved, and at last reached the water.

It was at this moment that Tracy appeared. The night before, he had left his mother, and to gain time, impelled by a restlessness which he could not explain to himself, and of which he was almost ashamed, travelled all night. The tempest had caused considerable delay to the train, and he had but just arrived. He had left his valise in the coach, and, like a good sailor, his first movement had been to run

to the beach. Without looking at any one around him, he felt his heart sink at sight of the poor unfortunates struggling out there, whose agony served as a spectacle to the idlers of a bathing-town. With the tender sympathy which binds together those who follow the sea, all over the world, his mind was not taken up with those whom he had come to see : his heart beat only for the sailors, who became his own, in the horrors of their frightful peril. Leo, who wiped his forehead with the very wet sleeve of his white flannel jacket, which had become anything but white, saw the young officer standing two steps away, and came to take him by the hand.

"Is that you?" said he. "You come in the nick of time! This is horrible weather, and a horrible business."

"Yes, a horrible business!" repeated Tracy. "How many men were aboard?"

"Five or six, I believe. Do you think they can be brought off?"

Tracy shrugged his shoulders. "One never knows," said he.

The life-saving crew were already in the boat.

The captain went forward to take his place. The boat, pushed by an oar, made a lurch ; a cry was heard, and the unfortunate man fell upon the gravel. Tracy and Leo jumped to help him up. In falling, he had broken a leg. The sailors looked at each other gloomily ; it was a very bad omen, and their crew was no longer complete.

Without a moment's hesitation, Tracy leaped into the boat. "Take the tiller !" said he to the mate, who looked at him in astonishment ; "you know the bay better than I do. I know it pretty well, but you are native to the place."

"Excuse me, captain, I am not willing to take the tiller while you are here," replied the man, who had recognized a commander, in spite of the citizen's dress which the young man wore.

Silently Tracy took the helm, and the boat, impelled by twenty strong arms, arose upon a wave, upon which it shot out as it receded. A wail of anguish issued from every breast ; women cried out, one was about to faint, and the frail bark, which carried with it the noblest courage of the world, made its way out, some-

times carried upon the billows, sometimes hidden by them.

Upon a full run, for he felt as if he had wings, Leo returned to his friends. He radiated with pleasure, he felt so proud of his ally. He was pressed with questions. His mother felt him over carefully, to make sure that he had no bones broken. "Have no fear, mamma," said he, "it is not I who have the broken leg ; it is the captain of the crew, poor fellow ! But do you know, ladies, who commands the life-boat ? Do you know who is, perhaps, going to give his life for people whom he has never seen ? "

He was listened to with open mouth.

"It is Georges Tracy. He has passed the night on the railroad, but he is not afraid of getting wet."

"I was sure of it !" cried Cecile, clapping her hands with delight. "I was sure he would come at the right moment."

"That he would come ?" asked Madame Barly, in amazement. "You knew, then, that he was coming ?"

Cecile blushed deeply. In her intense satis-

faction, she had almost betrayed herself. She slipped out of the scrape with surprising presence of mind.

"Mamma," she replied, in a tone of perfect candor, "Cousin Georges is a hero, and as he said in the spring that he was coming, he could not come if not at the favorable moment—that is to say, when there would be an opportunity of doing a heroic act."

There was nothing more to be said. Besides, the fate of the life-boat occupied all of the spectators. After having been two or three times near sinking in some terrible eddies, it now scudded rapidly under its bending sail.

"And you, Bellet," said Leo, with exquisite urbanity, "are you not a sailor?"

"A sort of one," replied Aristide, smiling with perfect composure.

"Like me," replied the young man, shaking the water out of his sleeves. "But, nevertheless, in case of need I go, all the same."

Cecile had said nothing more. Her pretty face had become grave. Her eyes turned from Aristide to Leo with a singular expression of

suppressed anger, as if she would prevent her friend from speaking more freely. With a slight frown she took leave at an opportune moment, and, like the rest, gave her attention to the life-boat and its crew. The way they had to go was a long one, but no one thought of the time of day, nor of breakfast, for which the hotel bells were vainly ringing. The boat, which seemed every moment to be swallowed up in the hollow of the seas, reappeared upon their crests smaller and smaller as it receded. The sail fell : a small black speck, continually lost to sight, alone represented the lives of so many brave men. They had reached the wreck, and were rounding the rock. Among the group no one dared break the silence. Bellet, only, twice began a sentence, but his voice sounded so strangely to his own ears that he dared not finish it. Nothing was now visible but the black reef above the blanching sea. Great sheaves of foam, thrown up by a more furious wave, rose in the air from time to time, like a bouquet of fireworks, and fell back in heavy showers upon the rock and the reef, as well as upon the life-boat. What was

going on behind that moving curtain? Of those who had risked their lives to save those of the shipwrecked crew, how many would return? Would even a single one of them be seen again?

Cecile's heart was wrung. She was a true sailor's daughter, accustomed from infancy to the heroic devotion of her own people. She knew that in times of peril they had never set a price upon either their labor or their courage. But here, near to port, under the eyes of an idle crowd, more curious than sympathetic, was it not horrible to see these men destroyed? And it was she who had called Tracy here! What grief and remorse would she not suffer, if he should never return!

"Lina," said she, softly, grasping her friend's arm, "they are in great peril, and they are brave sailors."

"Unknown heroes," replied Mademoiselle Lemartroy, returning her embrace.

"How one loves them, even without knowing them! Is it not so?"

"They are all our brothers," murmured the commandant's daughter; "better than we."

They exchanged glances, in which all the ardor of their generous natures was transformed into a gush of tears.

A prolonged though subdued "Ah!" burst from every bosom. The boat, with its heavy load, turned the reef. The wind filled the sail, careening the boat so that it seemed many times as if about to sink. It made good headway, nevertheless. A joyous, even feverish, animation ran through the crowd. With the aid of glasses they endeavored to make out the number of heads in the boat's company, but they could not agree, although the distance diminished rapidly. All at once a fearful squall traversed the waves, scattering the combings of the billows as the gunner's shot made the feathers of his game fly. The boat appeared to sink into the sea, and suddenly the red sail, torn from its fastenings, soared into the air like an immense bird.

"They are lost," cried Cecile, faintly.

The boat reappeared upon the crest of a wave.

"They are using their oars," replied Lina, triumphantly. All her father's blood spoke in her. The sea was no longer a friend at this mo-

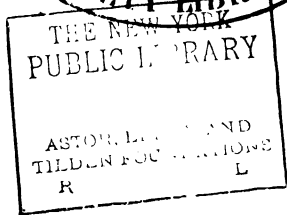
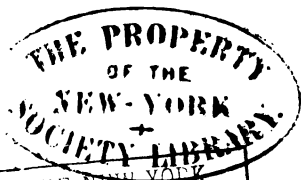
ment, but an hereditary enemy that had to be subdued, conquered, and reduced to bondage. She breathed hard, her head proudly thrown back. The constraint and ennui of the preceding days, all that had weighed upon her spirits, seemed to have fled into space with the red sail—glorious ensign—which was already but a speck on the horizon. The long oars were now distinctly seen dipping into the dark water and reappearing dripping with silvery drops, as the rays of the sun which had just pierced the clouds fell upon them. A great patch of blue sky appeared above the land, like a magnificent dais fringed with silver clouds. The heavy swell bore the boat to shore, where a hundred arms drew it high and dry amid shouts of joy. All the crew and passengers were safe and sound ; even the wrecked mariners, as much so as they could be after such a dreadful experience.

Of all the people, Bellet showed himself the most excited ; he took charge of a sailor, supported him upon his arm, and lavished the kindest expressions upon him. To see him, one would assuredly have thought that he owed his life to



"GEORGE," SAID SHE, AS SOON AS SHE COULD CATCH BREATH, "I AM PROUD OF YOU!"

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him. As he had no asylum to offer him, he was constrained to turn him over to some of the people of the town, who took him home with them. Very quietly Tracy made his way through the crowd, modestly avoiding the ovation which was made to the deliverers. He was bending his steps alone toward his hotel, when he heard his name called. He turned, and saw Madame Barly following him with all speed. He at once returned to meet her.

"Georges," said she, as soon as she could catch breath, "I am proud of you."

"You are very good, aunt; it is really too kind of you! How are you?"

"Very well, thank you," mechanically responded the admiral's wife.

Tracy continued his walk toward the hotel, in which she accompanied, without noticing which way he was going.

"You have come, then, to see us?"

"Exactly so! Will my visit disarrange your plans?"

"Not the least in the world. But, Georges, where are you taking me? Are you not coming

to our house? You are expected, and your place at table is reserved. And you must receive the compliments of your cousins; they are enchanted with you. Come along!"

"Wet as I am, aunt! I would be very uncomfortable. The sea water has not entirely washed off the dust of my journey, and I look like a thief."

"That shall not prevent me from kissing you, Georges, even in public," replied the charming woman; "I am altogether proud of you."

"And do you really mean it?" replied he, drawing her into the hotel. "Proud of what? I have done nothing worthy of such reward. It is only our every-day duty."

"That's true," she said, checking herself, dreamily. "In the midst of these landmen, I had forgotten it."

"Aunt," said Tracy, "I am so wet that I am spoiling the vestibule of the hotel; come up to my room, or let me go myself."

"Go, and come away at once; I will take you to breakfast with us. Cecile is beside herself with joy at seeing you come."

"So am I, my good aunt. Sit down in this arm-chair : in six minutes, by my chronometer, I will be with you."

The six minutes had hardly elapsed when Tracy reappeared, as neat, as proper as if he had come from the hands of a *coiffeur*. It should be added, that his beard, trimmed very close, and his hair, brushed up, fitted singularly the change in his costume. To get away, he had to stem the curious crowd who entered the hotel, forced by hunger and the unusually late hour. The people respectfully made way for him, and Tracy received the salutations of those who had never seen him, nor ever expected to see him again. He took it with all the coolness in the world, and, offering his arm to Madame Barly, leaned over her to speak in her ear.

"What is new at Dinard?" he inquired, not without repressed emotion.

"Nothing. Oh, yes! Just think of it, Mademoiselle Lemartroy is on the point of allowing herself to marry—you cannot guess whom—that imbecile Bellet."

"Bellet!" said he, with such an abrupt move-

ment that his aunt had a most complete revelation of the truth ; " Bellet ! "

" Yes— Ah ! my poor Georges, what a fool I was. Pardon me. But, Georges, you are a goose. Why have you not proposed to her ? " Tracy gazed with extraordinary fixedness at the horizon, indented by the waves. Madame Barly laid her hand lightly upon his arm, repeating, " Why not ? "

" Why not ? Do I know why ? She does not love me, that is why ! She loves that other man, probably, since she is going to marry him. "

" But until now, she did not love him. "

" Well, until now, I always thought, and still think, that her father forbade her to marry a sailor. "

In her turn, Madame Barly was astounded.

" A sailor ? Nobody ever told me that ; Madame Vallencour would have spoken of it. "

" But, my dear aunt, the choice of Monsieur and Madame Vallencour alone, for her guardianship, when uncle and you were proposed — "

" Ah ! " said Madame Barly, slowly, " that was it, then. But it is not possible ; I should have

been told of it. I know that the commandant feared that Lina would be unhappy. But," added she, with energy, "it was not to give her over to adventurers—to abandon her to that Bellet."

"The fact is," began Tracy, but he stopped. "Are you sure, aunt, that there is no clause in her father's will, forbidding Mademoiselle Lemartroy marrying any one in the navy?"

"Absolutely sure."

"How lies are propagated. The current report is, that there is a formal interdiction under pain of disinheritance."

"What nonsense! Ah!" said Madame Barly, angrily, "if people would only not meddle with what is none of their business, how much better the world would be!"

"Yes, aunt, that would be a great thing for those who are not of the navy. But then, whether or not he has said so explicitly, does it not seem to you certain, all the same, that the commandant did not desire one of the navy for a son-in-law?"

"That may be," said Madame Barly, meditat-

ing ; " but, whatever he has desired or not desired, he has only had at heart his daughter's happiness—and with you, Georges, she would have been happy, perfectly happy."

Tracy heaved a sigh, to which his aunt gave such a perfect echo that neither could help laughing.

"All is not yet lost," said Madame Barly, as they entered the cottage ; " the consent of the Vallencours is not given, and if you would really help your own cause a little yourself, they will not give it in the interest of Monsieur Bellet."

Upon his entrance, Tracy was assailed by a battalion of his cousins ; Cecile, only, kept herself somewhat apart, waiting for him to come and take her hand. When he was able to approach her, her pretty face was suffused, and she took on a little air of triumph. Madame Barly noticed it, and suddenly her good mother's heart was seized with anxiety. The warmth evinced by her daughter in her eulogies of Tracy, that blush, that happy expression, was not all this the indication of a romantic affection for her cousin, whose heart belonged to another ? However

Madame Barly would have rejoiced yesterday at the idea of her nephew for son-in-law, so much more reason she had to fear, now, the complications which could not fail to crush Cecile when she saw a rival in her friend. To prevent those complications, the prudent mother could conceive of no other way than to avoid giving any opportunity of private conversation between the young people, and during the whole day she struggled to prevent it. The constraint annoyed them as much the one as the other, and almost threw Cecile into a very ugly humor, which would certainly have happened, if the happy temperament of the amiable child had not made her impervious to any evil disposition lasting over twenty minutes. Tracy was then, willy nilly, fondled, fêted, pampered, by his six cousins, the eldest of whom would have liked to weave for him a crown of laurel, not for his courage, but in honor of his opportune arrival.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE weather having cleared up in the afternoon, about five o'clock people made their appearance on the beach, and Tracy came to salute Monsieur and Madame Vallencour, who met him with the warmest welcome possible. With the feelings which they entertained against Bellet, they would have welcomed the grand patriarch of the Mormons himself ; but the young naval officer had always inspired in them a special sympathy, and, besides, he was now the hero of the day. He had the greatest trouble in the world to prevent his friends from making him ridiculous by their exaggerated enthusiasm ; his six cousins—for Cecile, under surveillance, had become extraordinarily serious—would gladly have drawn him to the casino in a wheelbarrow bedecked with flowers. Bellet watched him out

of the corner of his eye, in the hope that this rival would commit some blunder, but he was mistaken. He was a rival, that could not be denied. The impertinent fellow took ostensible possession of Mademoiselle Lemartroy. "Osten-si-ble!" Aristide separated the syllables of the word in his mind, and flung them at Tracy like so many thrusts of a pike. And Lina received those ostensible attentions, and but for the habitual reserve of her manner, it could have been seen that she appeared flattered by them.

Aristide was beside himself with rage; he tried to invent some means of crushing the bold intruder, but could find none, which was not calculated to calm his humor; he withdrew somewhat aside to meditate, and his *fiancée*—or considered as such—appeared not to notice his departure. Oh, bitter pill!

Cecile was no longer near. The unconscionable prudence which the inquisitorial eye of the good Madame Barly imposed, weighed upon her to an inexpressible degree, and she was burning to inform her cousin of all that he should know.

Leo, since morning, had kept himself away:

the presence of Tracy deprived him of a good half of the ingenious pretexts with which he seemed to employ his time, mainly consecrated to turning things topsy-turvy generally in the home of Madame Barly, and all other homes where he had the honor to be admitted. Was it this absence which made Cecile as nervous as a palfrey under its first saddle? History is silent upon the subject, for the young girl kept her reflections to herself. The fact is, that at a certain moment she committed an unheard-of deed. Profiting by a general commotion caused by something of no importance, such as often happens in public resorts, or where almost all the people know each other, she passed behind Leo and pulled his sleeve. He turned quickly, but she pulled all the harder, with two little jerks, forgetting to say "mon-sieur" to him; forgetting, in general, all that goes to make up the respectable tribe of strict conventionalities.

"Don't look at me, don't speak to me, but, for the love of heaven, take mamma away! Do with her whatever you like, no matter what; take

her to play at 'the little horses,' or take a turn in a waltz, or go to see the shipwreck—I must speak to my cousin, or all will be lost."

"But, mademoiselle," said Leo, gravely, turning his back only in obedience to her command, "why do you not say to your cousin all that you have to say, without compromising yourself with me, who am compromising the gravity and taking the time of your lady-mother?"

Cecile became as red as a little radish, and Leo, who had faced about brusquely, could not but admire her under that pretty accession of color.

"Mamma imagines that I—that my cousin—well, that I am in love with him. Do you comprehend at last?" she concluded, as angrily as she could.

"Eh! is she mistaken, your mother? So wise a person——"

Leo dared not continue the pleasantry, for the "red radish" had real tears in its eyes, either of anger or something else.

"I ask your pardon, mademoiselle," said he, bowing his head, not daring to meet the blue

eyes ; he was wrong to fear them, for they were turned away, and the pretty face had become very pale. " I am a fool, mademoiselle ; upon my word, I swear it ! But we will speak of it later. I obey you."

All this had passed so quickly that no person near them had taken notice of it. Leo approached Madame Barly, and at the end of a minute and a half he had introduced her head into the watch-tower of Madame de Favieres, from which it was not easy to escape, the stories of that excellent woman being interminable.

" Quick," said he, in Cecile's ear, as he passed near her.

To the inexpressible stupefaction of her sisters, the girl passed her arm through that of Tracy, at that time disengaged, and drew him away, saying : " Cousin, I have something to tell you."

Madame Barly had turned her head ; she had seen the movement ; she attempted to rise. Cecile was so imprudent, she might say, without meaning it, some terrible thing. But Leo set himself so decidedly before the culprit, his two

legs stuck out upon the sand so firmly, that even with a vigorous push he could hardly have been upset. Besides, the admiral's lady was not the woman to proceed to such extremities. Madame de Favieres, without breaking the thread of the story, placed her hand confidentially upon the arm of that uneasy mother. Madame Barly drew her head again into the lookout, and listened with resignation, promising herself to lecture her daughter well before sending her to bed. Meanwhile, Tracy listened to his cousin's recital with perfect calmness, apparently, but with all the furies of a Greek theatre raging in his erring soul. "Why not wring the neck of Bellet, like that of a young rabbit? Must the law ridiculously protect such citizens?" thought he.

Cecile poured herself out at her leisure, turning her back to her mamma, so as to be sure not to see the signs which the latter might make her; she had burned her ships, and, certain of what she called "a regular dressing," she would at least get as much out of her escapade as possible.

At the signs of continued agitation which

Madame Barly gave, without meaning to, Leo understood that he would better interfere. He then approached the two young people, with the air of a man who knows all.

"Has the case been heard," said he, "and decided? What is the verdict? Death would be too lenient; we have better than that."

Tracy looked at him with such an expression of astonishment that the young man felt obliged to explain.

"My father has made inquiries, from which he has learned nothing. I, on my part, have done the same, and this is the advice I take the liberty to give you: To begin with, have you learned that it is of the first importance to give a soirée for the benefit of the shipwrecked people?"

"That is evident, but I don't take——"

"I have it!" cried Cecile, with a leap like that of a fawn. "He will repeat some poetry, and make himself ridiculous!"

Leo assented with a nod, in which he put his whole soul. "Well devised, but there is something better yet. A poet must make verses.

Without that, of what good is he? He is like a hen that never lays."

Cecile's face fell. "That would be giving him his opportunity," said she, discouraged.

"I ask pardon, mademoiselle. The soirée must come off to-morrow. He must make impromptu verses upon the occasion ; it must be asked and required of him."

"Well ?"

• "Well, he will not do it."

"Why not?" demanded Georges and Cecile together.

"Because it is not he who has been making verses ; it is a man named Bazoche ! Ah, I have had hard work to find it out, but I am not like papa, myself ! Papa has some fine correspondents ; for me, I have useful ones : the two do not at all agree. Yes, he calls himself Bazoche. I know him very well ; he is a charming fellow, only he is always starving, and in actual society that is so much a fault that it becomes a crime."

"This Monsieur Bazoche makes verses which Monsieur Bellet signs ?" asked Tracy, with disdain. "A pretty business !"

"Ah, monsieur, it is easy to see you are never dying of hunger," said Leo, with so grieved an expression that all three joined in a burst of laughter. "Bazoche is a delightful fellow, I assure you, and has some talent. But I, who know my Aristide, could not comprehend how he made such fine poetry. Now I know. His poetry is like 'his saintly mother'—his saintly mother—*fi!*" With an energetic shrug of the shoulders, Leo dismissed to the lower walks of life the unfortunate Madame Bellet, who was a thousand leagues from suspecting such a thing. "Set him to work ; let Mademoiselle Lemartroy require it of him."

"Mademoiselle Lemartroy?" asked Tracy, not without a touch of hauteur. He could not bear to hear the name coupled with that of Aristide, and his pride revolted.

"Yes, she herself, my dear monsieur ; he cannot refuse her. Then it will be one of two things : either he will make some poetry which will be execrable, or he will make none, and then we will unmask the good man. A little sword-bout, I imagine, would not scare you?"

Tracy expressed, without a word, that such an affair would, on the contrary, be quite to his liking.

"Especially," added Leo, "if it is Bellet who is wounded, as would be right and natural. But he doesn't produce any more sword-cuts than he does Alexandrines. Between us, I believe he is more expert in the art of showing feet than in scanning feet, and here almost entirely in that part of the art which consists in worthily receiving kicks."

Cecile laughed immoderately, while she said to herself that the lecture inflicted by her mother the coming evening would be a most remarkable one.

"Cannoneers, to your arms!" concluded Leo. "We are going to fire the powder whenever there is any to be found. Let us organize the soirée for to-morrow, or the day after, at the latest."

"Why so soon?" asked Tracy.

"For two reasons, my dear——"

"Friend," said the young man, offering his hand.

"Yes, friend! The first reason is, that we are all waiting to get rid of the person; the second, that if he is allowed time, he might find another source of supply."

"Oh!" answered Tracy.

"What do you expect? There are people who, for a consideration, will stop at nothing. Redouble your efforts, my friend, redouble your efforts, mademoiselle——"

"Me," said Cecile, "I will redouble into five. But if mamma shuts me up, how shall we work?"

"Shuts you up?" said Tracy in astonishment. The "little red radish" reappeared under Cecile's hat.

"Cousin," said she, bravely, "you have a good share of friendship for me, have you not?"

"Assuredly. What can I do to prove it?"

She was going to reply, but Leo interfered by putting his arm through that of Tracy.

"I will tell you," he said. "Mademoiselle Cecile is not sure of herself. Let us undermine the enemy's works."

Five minutes afterward, Bellet, who came again to Lina's side after having devised an in-

fallible plan, saw himself surrounded by a swarm of pretty women, who called him by name and talked all at once. Flattered by so much popularity, which he did not hesitate to attribute to his merit, Aristide put on the air of a sultan, which he believed to be quite irresistible.

"Some poetry, Monsieur Bellet—a poem for the benefit of the poor shipwrecked men!"

Supposing that it was a matter of recitation, Aristide smiled condescendingly.

"Some verses? Why, certainly, whenever you wish."

He had approached Mademoiselle Lemartroy. Bowing to her, he repeated, "When you will," in a way to show to the universe that it would be when Lina willed.

She gravely bowed her head. "They must be very affecting, monsieur," said she; "they must open the most rebellious purse. You know well how to tell a story of rescue."

That word brought a grimace to Bellet's face. They certainly were not going to make him glorify his rival, were they?

Cecile insinuated her fresh little face into the midst of the group.

"Monsieur Bellet," said she, "it is quite serious." Her voice sounded like a glass ball, of a timbre at once delicate and clear. "We take upon ourselves the collections, and we will rob the people conscientiously; but, in order that they may be ready victims, they must be softened to such an extent as to be powerless to resist. You are to make for us a poem that cannot be listened to without shedding hot tears. But not very long, you know: something like the 'Pauvres Gens' of Victor Hugo, but more forcible, more exciting."

"What assurance!" murmured Leo, astounded, in Tracy's ear. "Girls never stop at anything."

"It is marvellous," replied Georges; "she was always so, even as a child."

"And you have never fallen in love with her?" said Leo, in an inquisitive tone. Tracy smilingly shook his head.

"But, mademoiselle," said Bellet, defending himself as best he could, "what you demand of me is impossible. One does not make poems

that way ; one needs inspiration. The subject——”

“The subject ? It seems to me there is no lack of a subject,” replied Cecile. “Let us see, Monsieur Bellet.”

“Monsieur Bellet, Monsieur Bellet,” cried the voices of all the young girls in chorus. He was pressed from all sides, he was surrounded and circumvented ; he saw that he could not get out of it.

With the politic talent of all great diplomatists, he saw that to promise was urgently necessary, after which he would work out, no matter how. He promised, then, for Saturday evening—it was now Thursday. He had three full days before him ; it is true, a longer delay would better have served his purpose, but that was all they would allow him.

“You will not fail of your word, monsieur ?” demanded Lina, who had not once smiled since morning.

“I have promised mademoiselle,” said he, bowing like a vassal before his sovereign.

“Let us make the programme,” said Leo,

producing his note-book. "Every one must do something."

"And you, what will you do?" demanded Cecile, turning up her little snub nose at him.

"I? I will make no mystery of that: some feats of jugglery. I will make to disappear the most celebrated man of society. You will see." He was laughingly applauded, and the programme was rapidly completed.

Making pretext of the necessity of beginning this work at once, Bellet sought repose and silence in his chamber. A little before dinner, he went out to go to the post-office, to despatch an order to a mysterious address. Upon the threshold he encountered Leo, who held in his hand a voluminous package of diverse correspondence.

"Hello! do you frequent the post-office?" asked Leo of his friend. "What very bad taste! It is all very well for an impresario like me."

"I have to draw for some money," replied Bellet, taking his leave. Leo entered the office, when, after having nailed his package of letters,

he went to the grating and asked for a postal order on Paris.

The employee, mistrusting nothing, reached for the book which he had just put away, and Leo, whose lynx eyes would have deciphered a palimpsest from the wrong side, read, equally on the wrong side, the document which recorded officially the sending to Monsieur Bazoché, living in Paris, Rue Chappe 23, the sum of twenty francs, sent from Dinard by Monsieur Bellet.

"An order?" said the clerk, surprised at hearing nothing. Leo, recovering his wits, despatched a small sum to a house in Paris, who usually furnished him with articles for his tricks of legerdemain, in which he was very expert, then quietly demanded an order of a hundred francs in favor of Monsieur Bazoché.

The clerk eyed him in amaze.

"The same address as this," added Leo, politely, placing a bank bill upon the copper counter at the grating. Having enclosed the first order in the letter which he had prepared, our friend entered a café, asked for a sheet of paper and envelope, then elaborated to the address of

Bazoche a letter which contained not less than four pages closely written, and the composition of which gave him evident pleasure.

"Was it a chance that I knew how to read upside down?" thought he, as he carefully inserted the precious paper in his letter. "Was it another chance that that clerk wrote so legible a hand? I could never have made that stroke, for I had entirely forgotten the address of the Enchanter Merlin. We are going to have some fine amusement—not my friend Bellet, for we must allow he is too vile. He is a villain, villain—Bellet! It is Mademoiselle Cecile who will be delighted."





CHAPTER XVII.

THE next day was a wet and rainy one ; one of those days that, within doors, there was little to be found agreeable, and on the shore in a transient cottage, away from all familiar conveniences, it was impossible to be comfortable, even approximately. Aristide, shut in his room under pretext of Alexandrines, literally champed his bit in a very enervating way. Monsieur Vallencour gave no sign of having any answer to give him, no more in ten years than the same day ; Madame Vallencour, very polite, was about as encouraging as an iceberg, and Lina, since the incident of the rescue with the life-boat, shut herself up in a reserve which looked very much like expectation. Tracy, on the contrary, appeared satisfied with his lot. His aunt had invited the Vallencours and their ward to breakfast with him, and

the Vallencours, to enliven the hours of this rainy day, had engaged all the Barly cottage to dine with Monsieur and Madame de Favieres, together with Leo. While Bellet entertained himself by looking at the rain obliterate the ocean, gray upon gray, the inmates of the two houses enjoyed themselves immensely, in turn.

Lina was at first somewhat disconcerted by the sudden arrival of the young officer, who found her in a rather false position : not so much engaged that she could not easily annul it, and almost enough to feel annoyed in presence of a man who, she had every reason to believe, loved her. The smallest error of taste, the faintest discordant note, would have produced a painful effect upon the highly strung nerves of the young girl ; but Tracy was not only a man of excellent education, but of extreme courtesy as well—in fact, a gentleman in every sense of the term. So nervous was he himself on finding himself in such an absurd situation, that he was entirely upon his guard. One thing only was indispensable for the time being : he must make himself agreeable, and overshadow the importunate figure of Aris-

tide. The task was perhaps less arduous than he supposed. In his presence Mademoiselle Lemartroy after a few moments regained that perfect ease, that absolute serenity of mind, which she was so far from feeling with Bellet. She felt, without knowing why, that on Tracy's part nothing could occasion her the least embarrassment. It was a pleasure, after those weeks of agitation, of secret discontent, with others and with herself, to recover that quietude of mind ; to hear spoken words that she felt to be true and sensible, to have in regard to her surrounding neither doubts, dissimulation, nor mental reservation.

Tracy had no need of other arms to combat his rival ; the contrast, the presence alone of an upright, honest, and straightforward man sufficed to take from Bellet all the ground he had gained by ruse. In spite of herself, Lina felt the scales fall from her eyes ; the quiet heroism exercised the day before by the sailor, in contrast with the philandering cowardice of Aristide, had influenced her less than the present pleasure of finding herself in an element of good and honest

companionship brought by the new-comer. The Vallencours, the Barly family, the De Favieres, were all too close friends, too much in her every-day life, to give these impressions; the shock of an unexpected meeting was necessary to set vibrating all the dormant chords in Lina's soul, benumbed by her voluntary infatuation—shall we say, by her spirit of contradiction?

If Bellet had known how comfortable they all were without him, while the rain fell and the day wore by; if he could have seen his *soidisant fiancée* seated at table alongside of the young officer, so rosy, so gay, talking and laughing as she had never done since the unlucky intervention of the Neapolitan musicians!

They made charades, they played games. Leo filled fifty different rôles, each one with more spirit and drollery than the other. Through all his gestures and all his words sparkled a secret malice, a something like the froth on champagne, and with which he overflowed like a cup too small for its contents.

"I don't know what is the matter with him,"

innocently remarked Madame de Favieres ; "one would think he was a little tipsy. But he was so before dinner, and I have watched him well, and he has drunk nothing but weak claret and water."

Cecile was very grave. She had had such an overwhelming desire to chat a little with her cousin, to tease her mother, that it was a great trial to her to resist the temptation. It was not altogether that which caused a shade of seriousness in her blue eyes, when by chance she was an instant alone and quiet. She thought to herself that a sorrow was no doubt in store for her—for the smallness of her father's fortune, at which she had laughed during all her short life, might have a dark side to it of which she had never thought.

There had been so much noise, so much gayety during the whole day, that a great silence fell suddenly upon the assembly, like repose, or rather like lassitude. It was not yet nine o'clock, it was too early to separate, and nobody felt disposed to start anything new. "What shall we do?" said Leo, languidly, let-

ting himself drop into an arm-chair. "Something which would amuse us without any effort on our part?"

Madame de Favieres had a capital idea. She had always preserved a tender corner in her heart for Aristide, ever since he had dedicated a sonnet to her in his printed volume. "If some one would find Monsieur Bellet," said she, "he would recite some poetry." A formidable outcry arose from every one, except from Lina and Tracy, who were seated side by side.

"Oh, no!" said every one, without expecting such an echo. All looked at each other in consternation; everybody arose and went with apologies to Madame de Favieres, who was quite stunned by the result of her proposal.

"Mamma, your pleasantry has superbly succeeded," declared Leo with loud applause, as if his mother had really spoken in irony. It was the success of the evening. A little nettled, the amiable lady smiled at first, then laughed, and a minute afterward she was persuaded that she had really meant to provoke an explosion.

Lina had turned very pale. The proof of the small esteem and absence of all affection for Bellet, felt by those by whom she was surrounded, had wounded her; she felt herself lashed by the cry of disapprobation, but while her face blanched, she observed that the voice of Tracy was the only one that had remained silent. She was gratefully drawn toward him by this proof of tact, even in the midst of the moral disquietude into which she had just fallen. There was material in it for serious reflections, but the moment had not yet come to make them. She arose to assist Madame Vallencour in serving tea, and found, without being sensible of the change, amicable and polite expressions for everybody present, who had just before so rudely wounded her self-esteem. Little groups were formed; sociable but not very animated conversation ensued. Madame de Favieres, recovered from her perturbation, poured confidences into the ear of Madame Vallencour. "If you knew," she repeated for the four hundredth time since she had known her, "how much I would like to see Leo married. You

see yourself what an excellent husband he would make, he is such a domestic man——”

At this moment the domestic man exhibited some sleight-of-hand tricks, easy of performance without accomplices, to the great amazement of the Misses Barly. Having stopped, and firmly decided that they would have to coax him if they wanted any more, he stealthily approached his mother, whose conversations he delighted in surprising, pretending that they were the greatest edification of his conduct and life.

“There was a time,” resumed Madame de Favieres, “when I hoped he would make a rich match,” turning toward Madame Barly, who had just seated herself near her. “But no; that was not his idea at all. What good would it do him to be very rich? He has no expensive vices, he does not drive fast horses——”

“Only the *little horses*,” interrupted Leo in a loud voice, pretending to leave them.

He returned immediately, very curious to know all that his mother, whom he characterized, with more affection than respect, as “astonish-



ing mother," might have yet to say about him.

"Well," continued Madame de Favieres, who was not easily discouraged when she had once begun to talk, "he would be a model husband. Any mother might be happy to have him for a son-in-law. Don't you think so?"

The two ladies acquiesced warmly; there was no young man in the world more popular than Leo.

"He won't do it," sighed the mother of the prodigy. "Ah, if he would some day bring me a poor girl, provided she was amiable, pretty, well brought up, and of good family and sensible—if you only knew with what pleasure I would call her daughter. And my husband is quite of my mind; but he makes us despair—the unruly boy."

The head of the unruly boy was at that moment so near the unfortunate mother's cheek, that she received a vigorous kiss upon the said cheek. She turned round, but he was already far away.

"Young ladies," he cried, at the other end of

the room, "you have asked me for a new trick ; I am going to give you one. Let everybody come to order ; the grown-up people as well as the children."

The children, in the persons of the five little Barlys, sounded indignant protestations, which Monsieur de Favieres appeased by putting himself in the midst of them.

"The parents in front, all the children in the rear," thundered Leo's voice. He had yet in his eyes a little of the champagne foam, though his cheeks were more pale than usual.

"Parents in line : papa, mamma, Madame Barly, Monsieur and Madame Vallencour in front, in arm-chairs ; the young people behind, wherever they choose."

"Is it the magic lantern ?" asked a voice, while they laughingly obeyed.

"It is a trick of jugglery," he replied. "Pardon me ; an accomplice is necessary. Mademoiselle Cecile, will you come here a moment ?"

Ceremoniously holding Cecile's hand, while

she followed him, unsuspectingly, he led her into the dining-room—the door of which he left open—as far as the embrasure of a window, where he placed her before him, barring the passage.

“It is all for good this time,” said he, speaking rapidly. “You are not going to deny me, at least?”

“What about?” said she, much agitated at sight of his excitement.

“It is serious; it is forever. Do you understand? Yes! Come!”

He reappeared, leading her still pompously by the tips of her fingers. She allowed him to lead her, understanding all, but dying of fear, and yet so glad that she was ready to burst into tears. The lights of the room seemed to whirl round her in a giddy waltz..

“Ladies, gentlemen, and young ladies,” said Leo, “I have promised you a trick; this is it. We are going to transmute one person into another. Attention! I hold by the hand, and you have before your eyes, Mademoiselle Cecile Barly, have you not? With the approbation of

the constituted authority, and that of all the honorable company, I have the honor to present to you Madame Leo de Favieres."

Cecile violently jerked away her hand and ran to her mother, saying: "Mamma, I didn't know; I swear it." Explanations were not long coming; Leo, with bowed head, received a hail of reproaches for his folly, and a shower of kisses steeped in tears for his good idea.

"Can't you do anything seriously?" repeated his mother.

"Nothing," he replied, imperturbably.

Madame Barly must needs allege the necessity of obtaining the admiral's consent. Every one joined in the assurance that such consent was a purely formal affair, the admiral never having been anything but the most intelligent and best of men.

"That is nothing: he is too rich," said Madame Barly, sadly, shaking her head.

"It is an infirmity of which one may be cured," said Leo, meekly. After that there was only one thing possible. Madame Vallencour sat down at the piano, and there was dancing

until midnight, after which servants and chambermaids appeared armed with lanterns, water-proofs, and umbrellas, and the company separated.





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE next day was a day of confidences and gossipings. Everybody who has had a wedding in the family—and to whom has such an event not happened?—knows how many tongues are loosened, and how congratulations are exchanged when dreams have become realities.

Lina, at first so overcome with surprise as to have nothing to say, afterward embraced her friend with sincere and tender good wishes; but one pang still remained with her—the feeling which had never left her for a moment since the hour when she had allowed Bellet to take a place in her life.

Cecile was happy. Everybody was pleased. The idea of this marriage gilded like the sunshine the still sodden beach, which was slow in resuming its normal gayety. The smile of the young *fiancée* evoked smiles from every one else,

and Leo walked in Dinard under the impression that he was looking solemn, while in reality his expression was ecstatic.

Mademoiselle Lemartroy was entirely free from any feeling of jealousy, but she could not help feeling a peculiar sadness. She had wept bitterly alone in her chamber when thinking of her own position. Tracy's image was before her whichever way her thoughts turned, and she did not repulse it. A real sympathy, a profound esteem, which she could not help feeling, attracted her toward the young sailor—that sympathy, that esteem she would always have for him, married or not. Doubtless, but she well understood that Tracy would never come to Bellet's house. He liked Bellet little and esteemed him less. Who, indeed, around her, did like Bellet? Nobody; not even Leo.

Lina now saw clearly what she had been only vaguely conscious of before, that in marrying Aristide she would be separating herself morally from all that she had until now held dear. Passionate love might justify such renunciation, but was it true love that she felt for Bellet?

The young girl shuddered as she realized that she had never in reality felt any sentiment that resembled passionate love, or even mild affection. He had importuned her one evening, and she had not known how to repulse him. Was this sufficient ground for devoting her whole life to him ?

Ah ! if she had had around her only weak and complacent souls, how easily she could have broken this imaginary tie of conventionality, drawn round her by that impudent fortune-hunter ; but they had said no and she had said yes, and pride, pride alone, had prevented Lina from reclaiming her liberty—pride, and let us say, also, a more honorable sentiment, the thought that she had engaged herself to one who had given her no satisfactory pretext to break with him. Much pride—a small point of honor—was it these to which Lina had sacrificed her noble and haughty self ? She had in these reflections much ground for tears, and she wept.

While Lina was giving way to these sad meditations, Madame Barly had laid siege to Madame Vallencour.

"Listen to me, my dear friend. I don't know whether what I am going to say is quite correct, but since Leo has mixed himself in our affairs we have been going a little crooked." She laughed as she pronounced this severe judgment. Who could be severe with such an insupportable and irresistible creature? "Then," continued she, "I believe that it is absolutely contrary to rule, but I must relieve my conscience in the matter. Has the Commandant Lemartroy, yes or no, prohibited his daughter from marrying a seafaring man?"

"Yes or no?" replied Madame Vallencour, with perfect honesty. "No; but I knew that that was his wish. He had always regretted having left his wife alone and sorrowful during the half of their married life, and he desired for his daughter a more happy lot."

"More happy!" said Madame Barly with a slight sceptical smile. "Ah! if the men knew how much they gain by being lost to sight from time to time. During their absences their faults are forgotten; every husband ought to go away six months in the year."

"Six months, that would be perhaps too much," said Madame Vallencour, who was not for extreme measures. "Say three months. Why have you asked me this question, my good friend?"

"Because I know an excellent man, the ideal husband; he adores Lina, but he is a sailor."

"Ah! your nephew? Ah! he ought to have been the one," sighed Madame Vallencour. "The commandant liked him; I am quite sure that to him he would have made no objection."

"Is it too late?" persisted the admiral's wife. "Are there no means to get the poor child out of that false insufferable position? Indeed, she cannot marry that intolerable fellow, Bellet."

Madame Vallencour reflected a moment before replying. "You see," said she at last, "Lina is a terrible child. She was spoiled by her father, and she inherits a spirit of contradiction rarely equalled. To those whom she loves she will yield anything without discussion, and I know she will make a model wife. But to the dictates of authority she is intractable. If we had known her better——"

"Well?"

"Well, we would have consented—on conditions, at least. In view of the innumerable follies that that horrible Bellet has been guilty of since he has turned her head, I am convinced that all would have been broken off long since."

"Eh! but," said Madame Barly, meditating, "if that individual could be induced to commit a folly a little worse than heretofore, Lina would perhaps open her eyes."

Madame Vallencour shook her head in dissent. "All that we can do will only result in confirming the unhappy child in her idea. Monsieur Bellet must of himself commit some enormous blunder that she cannot help taking cognizance of."

"The thing is not at all impossible."

"He is cunning."

"Agreed, but you have some time before you."

"As for that, yes. Monsieur Vallencour is resolved, if he is driven to his last ditch, to refuse consent until Lina's majority. From now till then——"

"But what a life for you all! I pity you, and

I pity Lina," said Madame Barly, rising. "You are more embarrassed with your one girl than I am with six ; and, besides, she is not your own."

"Ah, that is just it," replied the good woman. "If she belonged to us, there are some things about which we could argue with her. Well, we must hope and trust."

"In the follies of Bellet ; yes, with all my heart."

While he was the subject of their discussions, Aristide did not remain inactive. He had written twice in succession to Bazoché, and finally had sent him a telegram, saying : "Why do you not reply ?" Bazoché had not responded, and the poet, in spite of himself, had begun to count the hours. He had at last a flash of genius, which led him to despatch a second telegram of the same tenor, but accompanied by a franked reply.

Bazoché replied : "You will receive to-morrow morning."

Full of confidence and joy, Aristide rang at the door of the Vallencour cottage, but learned with regret that everybody had gone out—which

was an abominable untruth—for Madame Valencour had given orders to make that answer after having seen him come, from the parlor window. This weary day ended like all the rest, and Saturday's sun rose gloriously at last over the bay of Saint Malo, over Dinard, over the blue sea, all glittering and fresh, and as if brushed up anew, so to speak. The fine weather gave the bathers a new lease. Everybody seemed delighted; the morning express had brought any quantity of things. Bellet had received from Bazoché a little poem of forty verses, very well turned. The envelope contained, besides, an order for twenty francs, the same that Aristide had sent, with some mysterious words: "Things are going all right. I don't need your money. I don't take pay for such services."

"He must have come into an enormous inheritance," thought Bellet, turning the little postal order in his fingers. "Zounds! the worse for him, the better for me—this twenty francs that I save."

Leo received an immense basketful of curious things, and a package of imprints that he

had ordered ; also a long letter from Bazoche, who seemed determined to make up in length for the shortness of the other epistle. After having read the letter, verified the contents of the package of prints, and felt down to the bottom of his basket, the young man set himself about rehearsing conscientiously some sleight-of-hand tricks. After dinner he visited the Barly cottage and asked permission to confer secretly with Cecile, which was granted him, upon condition that the secret conference should take place in a corner of the parlor.

"Be it so," said Leo ; "but I must have a screen to go behind."

After a little hesitation the screen was allowed.

Cecile disappeared behind it with her *fiancé*, a little table, the package of prints, and the express basket emptied of nearly all of its contents. The five young Barlys cast glances of curiosity upon the sheets of Japanese paper which enveloped such fascinating mysteries. They heard without seeing that which to them was the fallacious drop of water to the famished

traveller, which could not quench, but, on the contrary, only excited his thirst.

"Rolled ; the papers should be rolled, not folded," said the voice of Leo.

"Oh !" cried Cecile, " it is not possible."

"To roll them ? Pardon me, nothing more easy."

"Don't make game of me, please. Who sent you that ?"

"No indiscretion, mademoiselle. Eve put off her marriage with Adam to ask questions." Cecile's silvery laugh was her only response, and the five young Barlys continued to listen until Leo reappeared carrying his basket, closed to all investigations ; and neither supplications nor ruses succeeded in drawing from their sister the secret confided to her by her *fiancé*.





CHAPTER XIX.

BELLET had taken a great resolution ; instead of committing to memory the lines which Bazoché had so faithfully (and even without remuneration) sent him, he had decided that he would read them, for fear of a possible failure of his memory. And to fill in the time which he had at first reserved in the afternoon for this mnemotechnic exercise, he returned to the Vallencour cottage. He had need, great need to see Lina—not that his heart ached, but he wished to prove to his *fiancée* with what exactness her orders had been executed. Little as she appeared to expect it, he would offer her even the compliment of a first reading ; it was one of those attentions which were not at the command of every one. Let Tracy do as much, if he could ! Monsieur and Madame Vallencour had

gone out without leaving any word ; Mademoiselle Lemartroy having given no orders to the contrary, Bellet was admitted into the parlor, and to his great surprise found himself alone with Lina. His surprise changed immediately into a prompt and irrevocable resolution. Since destiny had ordered it so, he would make use of all of his privileges ; he would profit by this opportunity to achieve the conquest of the heiress. Until now all had conspired against him, not allowing him to bring into play the seductions of his skill ; the poet had done his work, the lover must now show himself.

Lina, seated in the embrasure of a window, had before her a little work-table, very light, but loaded with books, magazines, and needle-work : she was not working, nevertheless ; only dreaming, and looking out at the sea. Aristide approached, with a stealthy and rapid step, like a man who knows the value of circumstances ; he bowed very low, took the young girl's hand without waiting for her to offer it, and carried it to his lips, to imprint upon it a lingering kiss. Too lingering was Aristide's kiss, for Lina received

therefrom an exceedingly disagreeable impression, and withdrew her hand somewhat rudely. Bellet then took a chair, and sat close beside her. To take a chair and seat himself gracefully was an exercise in which he was quite expert, from long practice in his youth under the direction of a pupil of the conservatory, who afterward became one of the first *jeunes premiers* of Paris, although he was not yet over forty years of age. Mademoiselle Lemartroy found Bellet rather too close to her, but she said nothing; a strange timidity, and the fear of appearing foolishly prudish, took from her the power of self-assertion. She was afraid to make a circumstance of apparent intentions for which her imagination only might be responsible, and dared not expose herself to the mortification of seeing herself discomfited. Never had she been so circumstanced; never had a man dared to approach her with such offensive familiarity. She only recoiled imperceptibly upon her chair, too little to appear to be intentional, enough to give Bellet a hint in case he had any premeditation in his movement. But Bellet was not a

man to take hints, in love affairs above all things ; how should he take into consideration the feelings of a girl as sensitive and proud as Mademoiselle Lemartroy ? In his coarse appreciation of women, had he not said that any means were allowable to catch them, provided they were effective ; and with a young person so strictly reared, who was already half-affianced to him—he, who knew how to move her by the magic of caresses, was he not sure of her entirely ?

“ My dearest love,” sighed Bellet, at last ; “ at last I behold you ! I may tell you what mad passion your beauty, your delectable charms, inspire in me. Never since that divine evening—you remember it ?—never have I been allowed to see you alone a single instant. You do not long for my presence as I covet yours.”

“ But we have seen each other every day,” said Lina, very calmly—too calmly, in fact, under the circumstances.

“ Is it seeing each other, to exchange common-places in public ? ” replied the ardent poet, so carried away by his delirium as not to remark the coldness of the pretty face half turned away

from him. "Your hand, Lina, do not refuse me your hand."

She did not refuse him her hand, for fear of seeming ridiculous, as well as from a certain secret pride which induced her to brave an absolutely disagreeable impression; she yielded her slender, delicate fingers into the expert paw of Aristide, provoked as she was to hear him call her by her pet name.

"Oh!" he continued, "if you only knew the happiness you give me!"

Decidedly, that happiness was not mutual, for the little fingers made an effort to withdraw, but Bellet preserved his advantage and would not release her hand.

"If you knew," continued he, "how much felicity the soul of a pure and proud young girl can shed upon the heart of a man who adores her. I adore you, Lina."

"Monsieur," she protested, striving to withdraw her fingers, but he detained them still.

"I adore you, and you—you love me, do you not?"

Confused voices were heard approaching with-

out. Aristide said to himself, matters must be pressed ; the present chance would never recur, unless Lina brought it about. She must be made to do so ; fascinated, magnetized, she would come of herself freely to meet the one who would be her master.

"I adore you !" repeated Bellet, in a lower voice, choked with passion.

Slipping his disengaged arm around the form of Mademoiselle Lemartroy, he drew her quickly toward him, with intent to kiss the lips which had not yet replied a word to his question. But his lips encountered nothing softer than the murderous shell of a little comb, upon which Aristide almost broke one of his teeth.

Under the menace of that unauthorized kiss, Lina had dropped her head, and, overturning her work-table, which was in her way, she escaped from the arms of the conqueror.

"Go, monsieur !" said she, pointing to the door, with a firm but eloquent gesture.

Bellet, supposing that some one had come in, turned around, innocently. Why had she directed him to the door, if not because some one

had seen them? The idea that a young girl could feel herself insulted by such a liberty, when there was no witness to it, was one which was incomprehensible to such a brain. Oh, surprise! there was no one!

"Why don't you go, monsieur?" said Lina, with a gesture of resigned anger, which spoke volumes for the change which had come over her character, heretofore so lenient toward him.

"We are alone. Were you alarmed?" asked Bellet, again coming toward her. She measured him with a look of uncompromising scorn.

"Alarmed? At what?" said she, throwing back her head.

"No one has seen us," continued the coward, somewhat intimidated as he was.

"I am never afraid," said Lina, with a haughtiness in which her lover quickly comprehended his wretched fate; "never afraid—not even of you, sir. I only ask you to leave me alone."

Promenaders were heard talking, through the open windows.

"But you will permit me to see you again soon—this evening, even?" said he, humbly.

"Monsieur," said Mademoiselle Lemartroy—the tone of her fine voice had taken on the sonorousness of a clarion—"there has been between us a misunderstanding which has been of too long duration. I have taken you for what you were not; you have just now proved to me that you have been equally mistaken in me."

"I—mistaken! Have I not said I adore you?"

"Precisely. No one adores in that manner the girl whom he would make his wife. I did not know you, monsieur. I know you now, and I am grieved at the discovery."

"For one beggarly kiss?" replied Bellet, cynically.

"For one beggarly kiss! *Mon Dieu!* yes," retorted Lina, with cruel irony. "There are some things which, coming at the wrong time, are offences; but let us cry quits. You wished to be assured of my sentiments; you are now aware of them."

"You seem to know your own mind very well, mademoiselle," said Aristide, rudely.

"I trust I do," proudly replied Mademoiselle Lemartroy. "Until this day I never knew what it

was to feel contempt, disgust ! Henceforward I shall never deceive myself again. But are you not going away, monsieur ? Must I tell you for the fourth time ?”

Bellet was about to make some reply, when the door opened and Tracy entered. An expression of pleasure and relief lighted up the face of Mademoiselle Lemartroy. At the sound of that manly step Aristide felt that it was time for him to retreat. Repaying her with impudence, he bowed to his *ex-fiancée* and said, in a wheedling tone : “I pray you, mademoiselle, do not fail us this evening.” She answered him with a haughty nod. He went out, casting a glance full of malignity upon the young naval officer.

In Tracy’s presence Lina felt much embarrassed. The work-table lying upon the floor was undeniable proof of a *rencontre* little compatible with the dignity of a young woman receiving the visit of a poet, according to the usage of the day, at the sea baths.

“Sit down, monsieur,” said she, however ; “Monsieur and Madame Vallencour will soon

return, I think." She was stooping to gather up the scattered articles.

"Permit me," said Tracy, hastening toward the elegant disorder spread at his feet.

In the haste which each one made to repair the disorder, their hands touched ; Tracy quickly withdrew his, and a quick blush overspread Lina's face: Was it possible that the moment before Bellet had dared— The table was replaced upon its legs, the bobbins and the pin-cushions reinstated in the drawers, and the young people exchanged glances which provoked a smile. Not a word was said alluding to the incident nor to Bellet, and yet Lina felt sure that Tracy had guessed the scene that had just transpired.

"Do you take up a collection this evening, mademoiselle ?" asked he, calmly.

"I don't know, I am not sure of going to the concert," answered Lina, in a slightly tremulous voice.

"You *must* go," said Tracy, emphasizing the word ; "you have promised to solicit : it is a duty."

"Oh! Cecile and her sisters, and so many other nice girls, will collect enough without me," replied Mademoiselle Lemartroy, evasively.

"You must!" insisted Tracy, in a serious tone, without looking at her. "Trust in my experience. Will you allow me the honor of accompanying you there?"

She looked upon him with dazed eyes. All her wounded pride, all her outraged sense of shame, every sentiment which Aristide had offended during the several past weeks, shone out in her countenance as a wonderful florescence. "With pleasure," she replied, and in that conventional phrase Tracy saw a gratitude which defied all the eloquence of any studied reply.

Monsieur and Madame Vallencour, when they entered a little while afterward, were as much surprised as pleased to find the young people together, and to all appearance quite satisfied with the occurrence. A minute afterward Tracy withdrew, after having, for form's sake, asked and obtained from Madame Vallencour the favor which Lina had so willingly conceded. After he had passed under the cottage window,

and Lina was quite sure that he would not reappear, her pretty face took on unusual seriousness. Madame Vallencour, who observed it, trembled at it, asking herself what new storm was about to burst in their house, already sufficiently perplexed. With a sign, she was about to ask her husband to leave them alone, but Lina forestalled her.

"My dear madame, my best friend, my good guardian," said she, extending a hand of entreaty to each, "I have apologies to make."

Surprised and touched, for Lina had always been very reserved in her manifestations of friendship, the couple, approaching each other, took Lina between them.

"Yes, apologies, and yet that is not enough. I don't know how I can gain your pardon."

"My dear pet," began Madame Vallencour, without knowing what it was all about, "you may be sure——"

"No," said Lina, sadly, shaking her head; "you must listen to my story. You have persistently refused your consent to my marriage with Monsieur Bellet; you were a thousand times

right. He is a dishonest man, and I have just dismissed him."

"You have?" cried Madame Vallencour. "Yourself alone?"

"Yes, all by myself, and it was no easy matter; for, but for the entrance of Monsieur Tracy, I don't know whether he would have obeyed me. In short, I have taken leave of him, and now I thank you for having so firmly taken the part of reason and dignity—in short, all that is honorable."

Two mute but warm hand pressures responded to this little discourse. Then, all at once: "I am delighted, my dear ward," said Monsieur Vallencour; "but tell me, I pray you, how you could discern of yourself that Monsieur Bellet is a villain?" Lina's face was suffused with blushes. It was a galling task—to have to recount the scene which had disclosed the real character of Bellet. But she was as brave as she was upright, and she spoke courageously.

"I had no confidence in him," she said. "I felt that his mode of procedure had not the

stamp of truth : it seemed to me that, under the circumstances in which we were placed, inasmuch as you had not given your consent, he should not have paid his addresses to me so assiduously in public. Several times I have been on the point of telling him so, and then——”

“You have been afraid ?” suggested Madame Vallencour.

“It was not altogether that. You say you would have pardoned me, dear madame. I will tell it all to the bitter end ; your opposition turned me away from everything that might seem a concession to your ideas. It was very mean, it was abominable ; I assure you I am heartily ashamed of it.”

“Some other things have happened, perhaps ?” asked Madame Vallencour, after kissing the penitent.

“Yes,” said Lina, bravely, holding up her head. “Monsieur Bellet came, found me alone, talked to me of his love, took my hand—and then, my dear, good friend, I cannot explain to you how, but when I found my hand in his,

I felt, I realized, that that man was a horror to me, and that I could never be his wife."

"Why?" asked Madame Vallencour, very gravely.

"Because he detained my hand in spite of me, because—I don't know—nothing like it ever happened to me before, but I know, I am certain, that an honorable man would not have behaved as he did to a girl whom he respected; and if a man does not respect a woman before marriage, how will it be afterward?"

"Well spoken," said Monsieur Vallencour, rising. "And then?"

"Then I was in no gracious humor, as you may know; the gentleman wanted to kiss me——"

Madame Vallencour, in a rage, made such an abrupt movement that the little work-table attempted another somersault, and Monsieur Vallencour had quick work in catching it on the fly, without being able to prevent all its contents from being scattered on the floor. A burst of irrepressible laughter seized Lina, and she dropped into a chair. Almost terrified, her two

guardians stared at her in wonder, believing her to be a prey to a nervous reaction. She reassured them by a sign, trying to recover her equanimity, which was not an easy matter.

"He tried to kiss me," said she, in short sentences, between her fits of laughter. "I did as you have done, my good friend, and the table fell over."

Monsieur and Madame Vallencour laughed also, but only superficially.

"Monsieur Tracy came in, Monsieur Bellet went out; then Monsieur Tracy and I, we picked up the table and the things that were on it. That is all."

"That is all! It is quite enough," said the guardian, gravely. "I will hunt up Monsieur Bellet, and pull his ears."

His wife restrained him by a gesture. "Are you sure that he is worth the trouble?" she asked, with profound philosophy. "If I were you, I would simply turn him over to Leo de Favieres."

"Leo?" said Monsieur Vallencour, raising his eyebrows to the middle of his forehead, so little

did the rôle of redresser of faults seem to him to agree with that absurd young man.

"Yes, Leo, who cannot forgive himself for having introduced him to us, and who will relieve us of him, I will answer for it."

"Be it so," said Monsieur Vallencour, after a little hesitancy; "I will not touch his ears, but I am going to give him a little lesson, all the same."

He prepared to go out, and took his cane, which he had laid upon a table when he came in. His wife, who followed him with her eyes, cried, in a tragio-comic tone: "No, don't take your cane, I beg of you." All three laughed aloud in concert, and Monsieur Vallencour disappeared. After which, Madame Vallencour opened wide her maternal arms to Lina, who threw herself therein, shedding true and very bitter tears this time—tears of wounded pride, of regret for good intentions lost, and afterward sweeter and even beneficent ones, of gratitude for the delicate tenderness which was exerted to console her.



CHAPTER XX.

THE hall of the casino was quite full. A gay flutter of fans, a bustle of silken robes, the sounds of sonorous voices, announced that the company had come determined upon amusement ; a swarm of young girls, in white dresses, escorted by gallant cavaliers, prepared themselves to solicit contributions between the first and second parts of the concert, after Bellet had declaimed his piece, and awaiting the moment for chattering themselves out of breath. The orchestra began with the overture to "La Dame Blanche," and finished it in the midst of a perfect storm of applause. A tall slim man in white cravat followed with a song ; then a young lady played a nocturne of Chopin, and the concert finished its programme in the midst of the mournful ennui which almost inevitably accom-

panies amateur concerts. At times, Cecile cast glances into the hall. Instead of joining the squadron of begging collectors, Lina remained in her place between Monsieur and Madame Vallencour, well guarded, unapproachable ; no danger from that direction. But Bellet might enter in the hall, and by his presence spoil the plan of campaign so maliciously elaborated by Leo.

During the execution of the fifth number, the latter applied his right eye to a little hole made expressly in the harlequin's mantle upon the scene, and winked vigorously with that single eye in the direction of Cecile. Oh, miracle of love, the snub nose of the young girl turned also in that direction, and she understood exactly all that that eye said. It winked fantastically with scintillations of extraordinary joy, and Cecile translated for herself alone that mute language : "Bellet is in safe hands ; he will not come in until the right moment. Have no fear—I begin." The lady who had been singing lowered her music sheet, exposing her face, somewhat congested by the effort of the

last notes ; plaudits sounded from all corners of the hall, with the thumping of canes of the men, determined to do their duty to the last ; then the lady was replaced by two servants, who brought in a table covered with a large carpet. A sigh of relief came from the whole audience ; at last, they were to be amused. Leo appeared in a black coat, serious, irreproachable. His entrée was saluted by hearty plaudits. During the past month he had supplied Dinard with delightful diversion and gained universal sympathy. Great and small, old and young, knew him to be always ready to give pleasure to everybody. He saluted, expressed thanks, placed his hand upon his heart, and a loud laugh went out from all sides. When the audience quieted down he began his performance, accomplished with rare dexterity some ingenious tricks, and interspersed his programme with absurd remarks, which provoked continual roars of merriment. When he had exhausted the series of his exercises, he approached the prompter's box, his high hat in his hand : " Mesdames and messieurs," said he, " a generous muse has wished to

participate in your good work ; without prejudice to the beautiful verses to which you will listen a little later from the lips of Monsieur Bellet, she has devoted her work to the service of a poor conjuror, and has showered upon this honorable audience a deluge of Alexandrines made to draw tears from your eyes and money from your pockets."

After a graceful and wide-spread flourish of his arms, he began to stir his hand in the bottom of the hat, and, behold, a deluge of rolled-up papers foamed up to the top. It soon overflowed, and the youngest two of the Misses Barly came up with baskets, and while Leo saluted as he turned up the hat, evidently empty, the printed leaves were distributed through the hall. The applause was tremendous, but the enthusiasm moderated a little when the mysterious papers were read. They contained a poetic composition, entitled "The Rescue," and commenced thus :

" The billows rise, the sun goes down,
The tempests rage 'mid night's dark frown,
And all the waves to fury lash,
'Neath splintering spars and timbers' crash ;

While howling winds funereal groanings keep,
And desolation stalks upon the deep."

There were forty of such stanzas, signed "A. Bazoche," and dated at Paris, 24th July, 1890—the preceding month—printed by G. Chamerot, Rue des Saints-Pères, upon very nice paper, delicately tinted. They were read, passed and re-passed from hand to hand; but Leo had well managed matters, and had enough for everybody, and some remained in the bottom of the baskets. A solo upon the cornet-à-piston, played by a stout gentleman, was applauded unheard; nobody cared for anything but the poem; and the children, with elevated knees, and feet upon the rounds of their chairs, had already begun to repeat, *sotto voce*, the lines and their applications, when Bellet arrived. He was applauded in advance, to encourage him. He bowed, passed one hand over his brow, cast his eye upon the manuscript held in his other hand, and feelingly addressed the audience thus:

"Ladies and gentlemen: Before I begin, permit a modest author to claim your indulgence. Taken by surprise only two days since, I have

made my best effort to perform my task, but the time was short to compose to my liking a work of which the sole merit is its rapid improvisation. Have the kindness, then, to appreciate, in the lines that I am about to offer you, not the form but the sentiment."

"Bravo!" cried Leo, who had seated himself in the midst of the young people. All applauded, and Bellet, reassured by these evidences of the public favor, without daring to turn his eyes toward Lina, commenced, in the lowest pitch of his voice :

"The billows rise, the sun goes down."

A little flutter of surprise ran through the audience, and every eye consulted the printed papers. The movement produced a faint rustle, like that of leaves stirred by the wind.

"The tempests rage 'mid night's dark frown,
And all the waves to fury lash."

The rustle of the wind among the leaves increased. A little uneasy, Bellet looked around the hall; eye-glasses and lorgnettes were directed toward him in questioning severity. He continued, notwithstanding :

“'Neath splintering spars and timbers' crash.”

But here the voice of Leo, lowered to the pitch of an appropriate accompaniment, continued in the same time :

“While howling winds funeral groanings keep.”

Five or six young persons, encouraged by the pleasure of taking part in a good farce, joined in the succeeding line. They were not quite certain of its meaning, but it had a droll effect, and each one was pleased with his part of the performance.

Aristide stopped short, alarmed.

“Go on,” said Leo, in a loud whisper, as he audibly concluded the lines which followed. Bellet, astounded, looked at the papers with which all the audience were supplied. Seized with horror at his predicament, realizing at the same time why it was that Bazoche had returned him his money, he turned his back on the public and disappeared, in the midst of a prodigious roar of laughter.

Lina, very pale, had not moved. Leo bounded upon the stage, and his presence quelled the hubbub.

"It is to be regretted," said he, "that in consequence of an unfortunate misunderstanding, which was discovered too late, Monsieur Bellet was not able to recite the lines which he had composed for this occasion. You will permit me, at least, ladies and gentlemen, to read these, which are the work of a poet of talent."

In a sonorous voice he read the poem, with sincere feeling, which gave effect to their elevated sentiment, leaving in the shade those feeble lines. Raising his head, which he had bowed in recognition of the applause, the good fellow added: "The author of these lines is a young man of whom you will be very glad to know the name, that you may salute it when you meet it in a periodical, or under the covers of a book. It is Monsieur André Bazoche. And now, a collection will be taken up for the shipwrecked crew."

He jumped into the hall, seized the hand of Cecile, and led the collectors into the most obscure corners. Tracy followed, leading Lina, who accomplished her part almost automatically, bowing and smiling, but without being

conscious of what she was doing. Her cavalier, who divined her feelings, seconded her with infinite tact, so as to spare her every pain ; so well, indeed, that at the moment when the young girls, after having poured the product of their collections into the hands of the treasurer, returned to their places, it was Lina who, with a very slight but well-deserved and frank pressure of the hand, gave him thanks.

The incident which had deprived the audience of Bellet's poem was explained and discussed during the half-hour between parts, and, for the love of truth, it must be said that the second part of the concert was only relatively successful. The little scandal had been more interesting than any music. Before ten o'clock, all Dinard knew of the contretemps.

Madame de Favieres was only half-pleased, thinking the malice of her son a little too rough.

"Suppose Monsieur Bellet should challenge you to fight," said she to Leo, when they had returned home and she had a chance for explanation.

"He? Ah! my adored mother, you will al-

ways be the most astonishing of mothers. But at this moment the charming Aristide has only one fear, and that is, that somebody will chase him. I will bet that he has gone to bed at Saint Malo, if he could find a boat so late."

There had been no boat. The next morning, a little before seven o'clock, under one of those floods of rain common to Brittany, the ferocity of which nothing can appease, Aristide took the train for Paris, discomfited, ugly, spiteful, laying his ill luck to everybody but himself, but firmly resolved to ask no explanations of anybody, not even Bazoché. Bellet was one of those characters who find insults and offences sufficiently disagreeable, without finding it necessary to add the annoyance of demanding reparation.





CHAPTER XXI.

ABOUT the middle of January, Cecile married Leo. It was a very imposing ceremony, Madame de Favieres having decided to give to that day full scope to all her instincts of pompous grandeur. Fortunately, the reception which followed in the studio of the painter did not preserve the same character of glacial serenity, and the wedded couple could give themselves up freely to the expression of their joy, heightened still more by their natural good-humor. Admiral Barly came with Tracy.

"You see, now," said Leo, "the advantage to France of having a squadron in the Mediterranean. Suppose the admiral were at the other side of Polynesia, one or the other of two things would have happened: either his daughter would have had to be married without him, which would have killed my mother with grief ;

or we would have had to wait three years for his return, which would have reduced me to a skeleton all ready for an anatomical cabinet."

The day after that memorable day, Tracy presented himself to Madame Vallencour, who, after an interview of half an hour, left him, sending Lina to take her place. The young girl exhibited neither false modesty nor confusion; she knew what the navy officer was going to say to her, and her resolution was taken in advance.

"Mademoiselle," began Tracy, more calm than she, "I cannot tell you what I have in my heart until you have answered me one question, which I must presume to ask you."

Lina gave attention, with slightly bowed head, a little pale but very self-possessed.

"I have been told and, I have reason to believe, with some degree of truth, that Commander Lemartroy had counselled you not to marry a seafaring man. If that is true, and if you are resolved to obey the wishes of your father, I will retire at once, without importuning you further."

Lina raised her head.

"My father had but one desire—to see me happy. He feared for me isolation. At the bottom of his heart he felt a regret, almost remorse, for having remained so little at home with my mother, whom he believed to be unhappy——"

"Then?" asked Tracy, in a voice in which he tried in vain to hide his emotion.

Lina continued, slowly:

"But I know better about that. My mother may have had times of sadness; she never was really unhappy, because she—because she loved my father. And my father has forbidden me nothing."

"Then?" repeated Tracy, with a very different intonation.

"Then, I believe that the wife of a sailor can be a happy one, even during her long isolations, in loving her husband; and I shall not feel that I am disobeying the will of my dear departed one, in marrying a man worthy of esteem, whose friend he had been. And now, monsieur, what have you to say to me?"

They had not much difficulty in coming to

terms. Some weeks afterward, Monsieur and Madame Georges Tracy found themselves with Leo and his wife in an apartment house, where they received many friends. In the embrasure of a door stood a man of desperate mien, in an inspired pose.

"Look," said Leo, "there is Bellet after another fortune. Come, Tracy, we will put him to flight."

"It is not worth while," replied the officer ; "you see Bazoché going in, I think his presence alone will suffice."

He was mistaken ; Aristide was not of the sort who are disturbed by so little. The sight of Bazoché, in a black coat quite new, white cravat, gloves of pearl gray—so different from himself, in a word, for from this time he signed his own works—did not make Bellet quit his post. He only turned his head at his approach, to avoid seeing him.

"What assurance !" said Leo. "I would like to— But, really, if he were to marry a nice girl, it would be dreadful."

"Let him alone," said Tracy, amicably ; "he

is known now for a fortune-hunter; he will be no more married at fifty than he is now. We need not trouble ourselves; his is a wasted life. He has not even a morsel left to him. He must have left all at Dinard."

While they amused themselves thus, Lina looked at Bellet with an expression of deep interest mixed with a shade of sadness.

"And to think that, for a few compliments and borrowed poems—or, rather, cheaply bought ones—from an impoverished poet, I had almost consummated the misfortune and shame of my life."

All the foxes are not in the woods, and the ravens wear sometimes *décolleté* dresses, even white ones.



